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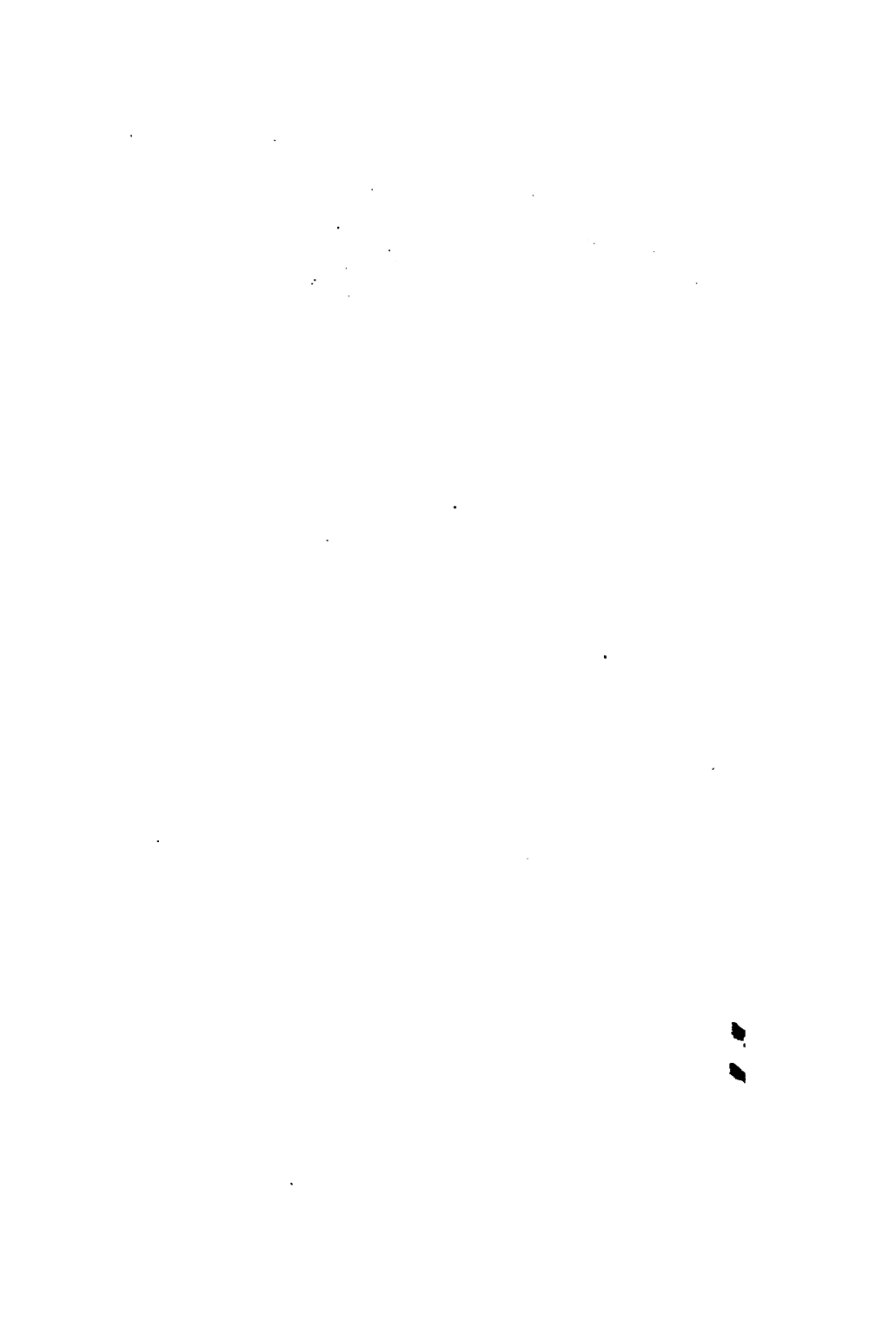
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THE HEADSMAN;

OR,

THE ABBAYE DES VIGNERONS.

A TALE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ABBAYE DES VIGNERONS."

Printed at the Press of the
London and Westminster

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1852.

THE HEADSMAN;

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A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE BRAVO," &c. &c.

"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds,
Makes deeds ill done!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE HEADSMAN.

CHAPTER I

As yet the trembling year is unconfirm'd,
And winter oft, at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightful :—

THOMSON.

THE horn of Pierre Dumont was blowing beneath the windows of the inn of Martigny, with the peep of dawn. Then followed the appearance of drowsy domestics, the saddling of unwilling mules, and the loading of baggage. A few minutes later, the little caravan

was assembled, for the cavalcade almost deserved this name, and the whole were in motion for the summits of the Alps.

The travellers now left the valley of the Rhone to bury themselves amid those piles of misty and confused mountains, which formed the back-ground of the picture they had studied from the castle of Blonay and the sheet of the Lemman. They soon plunged into a glen, and, following the windings of a brawling torrent, were led gradually, and by many turnings, into a country of bleak upland pasturage, where the inhabitants gained a scanty livelihood, principally by means of their dairies.

A few leagues above Martigny, the paths again separated, one inclining to the left towards the elevated valley that has since become so celebrated in the legends of this wild region, by the formation of a little lake in its glacier, which, becoming too heavy for its foundation, broke through its barrier of ice, and descended in a mountain of water to the

Rhone, a distance of many leagues, sweeping before it every vestige of civilization that crossed its course, and even changing, in many places, the face of nature itself. Here the glittering peak of Vélán became visible, and, though so much nearer to the eye than when viewed from Vévey, it was still a distant shining pile, grand in its solitude and mystery, on which the sight loved to dwell as it studies the pure and spotless edges of some sleepy cloud.

It has already been said, that the ascent of the great St. Bernard, with the exception of occasional hills and hollows, is nowhere very precipitous but at the point at which the last rampart of rock is to be overcome. On the contrary, the path, for leagues at a time, passes along tolerably even valleys, though of necessity the general direction is upward, and for most of the distance through a country that admits of cultivation, though the meagreness of the soil, and the shortness of the seasons, render but an indifferent return to the toil of the

husbandman. In this respect it differs from most of the other Alpine passes; but if it wants the variety, wildness, and sublimity of the Splugen, the St. Gothard, the Gemmi, and the Simplon, it is still an ascent on a magnificent scale, and he who journeys on its path is raised, as it were, by insensible degrees, to an elevation that gradually changes all his customary associations with the things of the lower world.

From the moment of quitting the inn to that of the first halt, Melchior de Willading and the Signor Grimaldi rode in company, as on the previous day. These old friends had much to communicate in confidential discourse which the presence of Roger de Blonay, and the importunities of the bailiff, had hitherto prevented them from freely saying. Both had thought maturely, too, on the situation of Adelheid, of her hopes, and of her future fortunes, and both had reasoned much as two old nobles of that day, who were not without strong

sympathies for their kind, while they were too practised to overlook the world and its ties, would be likely to reason on an affair of this delicate nature.

“There came a feeling of regret, perhaps I might fairly call it by its proper name, of envy,” observed the Genoese, in the pursuance of the subject which engrossed most of their time and thoughts, as they rode slowly along, the bridles dangling from the necks of their mules, —“there came a feeling of regret, when I first saw the fair creature that calls thee father, Melchior. God has dwelt mercifully by me, in respect to many things that make men happy ; but he rendered my marriage accursed, not only in its bud, but in its fruit. Thy child is dutiful and loving, all that a father can wish ; and yet here is this unusual attachment come to embarrass, if not to defeat, thy fair and just hopes for her welfare ! This is no common affair, that a few threats of bolts and a change of scene will cure, but a rooted affection that

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innovation with any other than my own daughter. Let them who like philosophy and justice, and natural rights so well, commence by setting us the example."

"Thou hast hit the stumbling-block that causes a thousand well-digested plans for the improvement of the world to fail, honest Melchior. Could we toil with others' limbs, sacrifice with others' groans, and pay with others' means, there would be no end to our industry, our disinterestedness, or our liberality—and yet it were a thousand pities that so sweet a girl and so noble a youth should not yoke!"

"'Twould be a yoke indeed, for a daughter of the house of Willading;" returned the graver father, with emphasis. "I have looked at this matter in every face that becomes me, Gaetano, and though I would not rudely repulse one that hath saved my life, by driving him from my company, at a moment when even strangers consort for mutual aid and protection, at Turin we must part for ever!"

“ I know not how to approve, nor yet how to blame thee, poor Melchior ! ’Twas a sad scene, that of the refusal to wed Balthazar’s daughter, in the presence of so many thousands !”

“ I take it as a happy and kind warning of the precipice to which a foolish tenderness was leading us both, my friend.”

“ Thou may’st have reason ; and yet I wish thou wert more in error than ever Christian was ! These are rugged mountains, Melchior, and, fairly passed, it might be so arranged that the boy should forget Switzerland for ever. He might become a Genoese, in which event, dost thou not see the means of overcoming some of the present difficulty ?”

“ Is the heiress of my house a vagrant, Signor Grimaldi, to forget her country and birth ?”

“ I am childless, in effect, if not in fact ; and where there are the will and the means, the end should not be wanting. We will

speak of this under the warmer sun of Italy, which they say is apt to render hearts tender.”

“The hearts of the young and amorous, good Gaetano, but, unless much changed of late, it is as apt to harden those of the old, as any sun I know of;” returned the baron, shaking his head, though it much exceeded his power to smile at his own pleasantry when speaking on this painful subject. “Thou knowest that in this matter I act only for the welfare of Adelheid, without thought of myself, and it would little comport with the honour of a baron of an ancient house, to be the grandfather of children who come of a race of executioners.”

The Signor Grimaldi succeeded better than his friend in raising a smile, for, more accustomed to dive into the depths of human feeling, he was not slow in detecting the mixture of motives that were silently exercising their long-established influence over the heart of his really well-intentioned companion.

“ So long as thou speakest of the wisdom of respecting men’s opinions, and the danger of wrecking thy daughter’s happiness by running counter to their current, I agree with thee to the letter ; but, to me, it seems possible so to place the affair, that the world shall imagine all is in rule, and, by consequence, all proper. If we can overcome ourselves, Melchior, I apprehend no great difficulty in blinding others.”

The head of the Bernois dropped upon his breast, and he rode a long distance in that attitude, reflecting on the course it most became him to pursue, and struggling with the conflicting sentiments which troubled his upright but prejudiced mind. As his friend understood the nature of this inward strife, he ceased to speak, and a long silence succeeded the discourse.

It was different with those who followed. Though long accustomed to gaze at their native mountains from a distance, this was the

first occasion on which Adelheid and her companion had ever actually penetrated into their glens, or journeyed on their broken and changing faces. The path of St. Bernard, therefore, had all the charm of novelty, and their youthful and ardent minds were soon won from meditating on their own causes of unhappiness to admiration of the sublime works of nature. The cultivated taste of Adelheid, in particular, was quick in detecting those beauties of a more subtle kind which the less instructed are apt to overlook, and she found additional pleasure in pointing them out to the ingenuous and wondering Christine, who received these, her first, lessons in that grand communion with nature which is pregnant with so much unalloyed delight, with gratitude, and a readiness of comprehension, that amply repaid her instructress. Sigismund was an attentive and pleased listener of what was passing, though one who had so often passed the mountains, and who had seen them familiarly on their

warmer and more sunny side, had little to learn, himself, even from so skilful and alluring a teacher.

As they ascended, the air became purer and less impregnated with the humidity of its lower currents; changing, by a process as fine as that wrought by a chemical application, the hues and aspect of every object in the view. A vast hill-side lay basking in the sun, which illuminated on its rounded swells a hundred long stripes of grain in every stage of verdure, resembling so much delicate velvet that was thrown in a variety of accidental faces to the light, while the shadows ran away, to speak technically, from this *foyer de lumière* of the picture, in gradations of dusky russet and brown, until the *colonne de vigueur* was obtained in the deep black cast from the overhanging branches of a wood of larch in the depths of some ravine, into which the sight with difficulty penetrated. These were the beauties on which Adelheid most loved to dwell, for they

are always the charms that soonest strike the true admirer of nature, when he finds himself raised above the lower and less purified strata of the atmosphere, into the regions of more radiant light and brightness. It is thus that the physical, no less than the moral, vision becomes elevated above the impurities that cling to this nether world, attaining a portion of that spotless and sublime perception, as we ascend, by which we are more nearly assimilated to the truths of creation ; a poetical type of the greater and purer enjoyment we feel, as morally receding from earth we draw nearer to heaven.

The party rested for several hours, as usual, at the little mountain hamlet of Liddes. At the present time, it is not uncommon for the traveller, favoured by a wheel-track along this portion of the route, to ascend the mountain and to return to Martigny in the same day. The descent in particular, after reaching the village just named, is soon made ; but at

the period of our tale, such an exploit, if ever made, was of very rare occurrence. The fatigue of being in the saddle so many hours compelled our party to remain at the inn much longer than is now practised, and their utmost hope was to be able to reach the convent before the last rays of the sun had ceased to light the glittering peak of Vélán.

There occurred here, too, some unexpected detention on the part of Christine, who had retired with Sigismund soon after reaching the inn, and who did not rejoin the party until the impatience of the guide had more than once manifested itself in such complaints as one in his situation is apt to hazard. Adelheid saw with pain, when her friend did at length rejoin them, that she had been weeping bitterly ; but, too delicate to press her for an explanation on a subject in which it was evident the brother and sister did not desire to bestow their confidence, she communicated her readiness to depart to the domestics, without the slightest

allusion to the change in Christine's appearance, or to the unexpected delay of which she had been the cause.

Pierre muttered an *ave* in thankfulness that the long halt was ended. He then crossed himself with one hand, while with the other he flourished his whip, among a crowd of gapingurchins and slaving cretins, to clear the way for those he guided. His followers were, in the main, of a different mood. If the traveller too often reaches the inn hungry and disposed to find fault, he usually quits it good-humoured and happy. The restoration, as it is well called in France, effected by means of the ladder and the resting of wearied limbs, is usually communicated to the spirits; and it must be a crusty humour indeed, or singularly bad fare, that prevents a return to a placid state of mind. The party, under the direction of Pierre, formed no exception to the general rule. The two old nobles had so far forgotten the subject of their morning dialogue, as to be facetious, and

ere long, even their gentle companions were disposed to laugh at some of their sallies, in spite of the load of care that weighed so constantly and so heavily on both. In short, such is the waywardness of our feelings, and so difficult is it to be always sorrowful as well as always happy, that the well-satisfied landlady, who had, in truth, received the full value of a very indifferent fare, was ready to affirm, as she curtsied her thanks on the dirty threshold, that a merrier party had never left her door.

“ We shall take our revenge out of the casks of the good Augustines to-night for the sour liquor of this inn ; is it not so, honest Pierre ? ” demanded the Signor Grimaldi, adjusting himself in the saddle, as they got clear of the stones, sinuosities, projecting roofs, and filth of the village, into the more agreeable windings of the ordinary path, again. “ Our friend, the clavier, is apprised of the visit, and as we have already gone through fair and foul in company, I look to his fellowship for some compensa-

tion for the frugal meal of which we have just partaken."

"Father Xavier is a hospitable and a happy-minded priest, Signore, and that the saints will long leave him keeper of the convent-keys, is the prayer of every muleteer, guide, or pilgrim, who crosses the col. I wish we were going up the rough steps, by which we are to climb the last rock of the mountain, at this very moment, Messieurs, and that all the rest of the way were as fairly done as this we have so happily passed."

"Dost thou anticipate difficulty, friend?" demanded the Italian, leaning forward on his saddle-bow, for his quick observation had caught the examining glance that the guide threw around at the heavens.

"Difficulty is a meaning not easily admitted by a mountaineer, Signore; and I am one of the last to think of it, or to feel its dread. Still, we are near the end of the season, and these hills are high and bleak, and those that

follow are delicate flowers for a stormy heath. Toil is always sweeter in the remembrance than in the expectation.—I mean no more, if I mean that.”

Pierre stopped his march as he ceased speaking. He stood on a little eminence of the path, whence, by looking back, he commanded a view of the opening among the mountains which indicates the site of the valley of the Rhone. The look was long and understanding; but, when it was ended, he turned and resumed his march with the business-like air of one more disposed to act than to speculate on the future. But for the few words which had just escaped him, this natural movement would have attracted no attention; and, as it was, it was observed by none but the Signor Grimaldi, who would himself have attached little importance to the whole, had the guide maintained his usual pace.

As is common in the Alps, the conductor of the travellers went on foot, leading the whole

party at such a gait as he thought most expedient for man and beast. Hitherto, Pierre had proceeded with sufficient leisure, rendering it necessary for those who followed to observe the same moderation ; but he now walked sensibly faster, and frequently so fast as to make it necessary for the mules to break into easy trots, in order to maintain their proper stations. All this, however, was ascribed by most of the party to the formation of the ground, for, after leaving Liddes, there is a long reach of what, among the upper valleys of the Alps, may by comparison be called a level road. This industry, too, was thought to be doubly necessary, in order to repair the time lost at the inn, for the sun was already dipping towards the western boundary of their narrow view of the heavens, and the temperature announced, if not a sudden change in the weather, at least the near approach of the periodical turn of the day.

“ We travel by a very ancient path ; ” observed

the Signor Grimaldi, when his thoughts had reverted from their reflections on the movements of the guide to the circumstances of their present situation. "A very reverend path, it might be termed in compliment to the worthy monks who do so much to lessen its dangers, and to its great antiquity. History speaks often of its use by different leaders of armies, for it has long been a thoroughfare for those who journey between the north and the south, whether it be in strife, or in amity. In the time of Augustus it was the route commonly used by the Roman Legions in their passages to and from Helvetia and Gaul; the followers of Cæcinna went by these gorges to their attack upon Otho; and the Lombards made the same use of it, five hundred years later. It was often trod by armed bands, in the wars of Charles of Burgundy, those of Milan, and in the conquests of Charlemagne. I remember a tale, in which it is said that a horde of infidel Corsairs from the Mediterranean pene-

trated by this road, and seized upon the bridge of St. Maurice with a view to plunder. As we are not the first, so it is probable that we are not to be the last, who have trusted themselves in these regions of the upper air, bent on our objects, whether of love or of strife."

"Signore," observed Pierre respectfully, when the Genoese ceased speaking, "if your *eccellenza* would make your discourse less learned, and more in those familiar words which can be said under a brisk movement, it might better suit the time and the great necessity there is to be diligent."

"Dost thou apprehend danger? Are we behind our time?—Speak; for I dislike concealment."

"Danger has a strong meaning in the mouth of a mountaineer, Signore; for what is security on this path, might be thought alarming lower down in the valleys; I say it not. But the sun is touching the rocks, as you see, and we are drawing near to places, where a miss-step

of a mule in the dark might cost us dear. I would that all diligently improve the daylight, while they can."

The Genoese did not answer, but he urged his mule again to a gait that was more in accordance with the wishes of Pierre. The movement was followed, as a matter of course, by the rest, and the whole party was once more in a gentle trot, which was scarcely sufficient, however, to keep even pace with the long, impatient, and rapid strides of Pierre, who, notwithstanding his years, appeared to get over the ground with a facility that cost him no effort. Hitherto, the heat had not been small, and, in that pure atmosphere, all its powers were felt during the time the sun's rays fell into the valley ; but, the instant they were intercepted by a brown and envious peak of the mountains, their genial influence was succeeded by a chill that sufficiently proved how necessary was the presence of the luminary to the comfort of those who dwelt at that great

elevation. The females sought their mantles the moment the bright light was followed by the usual shadow ; nor was it long before even the more aged of the gentlemen were seen unstrapping their cloaks, and taking the customary precautions against the effects of the evening air.

The reader is not to suppose, however, that all these little incidents of the way occurred in a time as brief as that which has been consumed in the narration. A long line of path was travelled over before the Signor Grimaldi and his friend were cloaked, and divers hamlets and cabins were successively passed. The alteration from the warmth of day to the chill of evening also was accompanied by a corresponding change in the appearance of the objects they passed. St. Pierre, a cluster of stone-roofed cottages, which bore all the characteristics of the inhospitable region for which they had been constructed, was the last village ; though there was a hamlet, at the bridge of Hudri, composed of a few dreary abodes,

which, by their aspect, seemed the connecting link between the dwellings of man and the caverns of beasts. Vegetation had long been growing more and more meagre, and it was now fast melting away into still deeper and irretrievable traces of sterility, like the shadows of a picture passing through their several transitions of colour to the depth of the background. The larches and cedars diminished gradually in size and numbers, until the straggling and stunted tree became a bush, and the latter finally disappeared in the shape of a tuft of pale green, that adhered to some crevice in the rocks like so much moss. Even the mountain grasses, for which Switzerland is so justly celebrated, grew thin and wiry; and by the time the travellers reached the circular basin at the foot of the peak of Vélán, which is called La Plaine de Prou, there only remained, in the most genial season of the year, and that in isolated spots between the rocks, a sufficiency of nourishment for the support of a small

flock of adventurous, nibbling, and hungry goats.

The basin just alluded to is an opening among high pinnacles, and is nearly surrounded by naked and ragged rocks. The path led through its centre, always ascending on an inclined plane, and disappeared through a narrow gorge around the brow of a beetling cliff. Pierre pointed out the latter as the pass by far the most dangerous on this side the Col, in the season of the melting snows, avalanches frequently rolling from its crags. There was no cause for apprehending this well-known Alpine danger, however, in the present moment ; for, with the exception of Mont-Vélan, all above and around them lay in the same dreary dress of sterility. Indeed, it would not be easy for the imagination to conceive a more eloquent picture of desolation than that which met the eyes of the travellers, as, following the course of the run of water that trickled through the middle of the inhospitable valley,

the certain indication of the general direction of their course, they reached its centre.

The time was getting to be that of early twilight, but the sombre colour of the rocks, streaked and venerable by the ferruginous hue with which time had coated their sides, and the depth of the basin, gave to their situation a melancholy gloom passing the duski-ness of the hour. On the other hand, the light rested bright and gloriously on the snowy peak of Vélan, still many thousand feet above them, though in plain, and apparently, in near view; while rich touches of the setting sun were gleaming on several of the brown, natural battlements of the Alps, which, worn with eternal exposure to the storms, still lay in sublime confusion at a most painful elevation in their front. The azure vault that canopied all, had that look of distant glory and of grand repose, which so often meets the eye, and so forcibly strikes the mind, of him who travels in the deep valleys and embedded lakes of Swit-

zerland. The glacier of Valsorey descended from the upper region nearly to the edge of the valley, bright and shining, its lower margin streaked and dirty with the *débris* of the overhanging rocks, as if doomed to the fate of all that came upon the earth, that of sharing its impurities.

There no longer existed any human habitation between the point which the travellers had now attained and the convent, though more modern speculation, in this age of curiosity and restlessness, has been induced to rear a substitute for an inn in the spot just described, with the hope of gleaning a scanty tribute from those who fail of arriving in season to share the hospitality of the monks. The chilliness of the air increased faster even than the natural change of the hour would seem to justify, and there were moments when the dull sound of the wind descended to their ears, though not a breath was stirring a withered and nearly solitary blade of grass at their feet. Once or

twice, large black clouds drove across the opening above them, resembling heavy-winged vultures sailing in the void, preparatory to a swoop upon their prey.

CHAPTER II.

Through this gap
On and say nothing, lest a word, a breath,
Bring down a winter's snow, enough to overwhelm
The armed files that, night and day, were seen
Winding from cliff to cliff in loose array,
To conquer at Marengo. *Italy.*

PIERRE DUMONT halted in the middle of the sterile little plain, while he signed for those he conducted to continue their ascent. As each mule passed it received a blow or a kick from the impatient guide, who did not seem to think it necessary to be very ceremonious with the poor beasts, and had taken this simple method to give a general and a brisker impulsion to the party. The expedient was so

natural, and so much in accordance with the practice of the muleteers and others of their class, that it excited no suspicion in most of the travellers, who pursued their way, either meditating on and enjoying the novel and profound emotions that their present situation so naturally awakened, or discoursing lightly, in the manner of the thoughtless and unconcerned. The Signor Grimaldi alone, whose watchfulness had already been quickened by previous distrust, took heed of the movement. When all had passed, the Genoese turned in his saddle, and cast an apparently careless look behind. But the glance in truth was anxious and keen. Pierre stood looking steadily at the heavens, one hand holding his hat, and the other extended with an open palm. A glittering particle descended to the latter, when the guide instantly resumed his place in advance. As he passed the Italian, however, meeting an inquiring look, he permitted the other to see a snow-

drop so thoroughly congealed, as to have not yet melted with the natural heat of his skin. The eye of Pierre appeared to impose discretion on his confident, and the silent communion escaped the observation of the rest of the travellers. Just at this moment, too, the attention of the others was luckily called to a different object, by a cry from one of the muleteers, of whom there were three as assistants to the guide. He pointed out a party which, like themselves, was holding the direction of the Col. There was a solitary individual mounted on a mule, and a single pedestrian, without any guide, or other traveller, in their company. Their movements were swift, and they had not been more than a minute in view, before they disappeared behind an angle of the crags which nearly closed the valley on the side of the convent, and which was the precise spot already mentioned as being so dangerous in the season of the melting snows.

"Dost thou know the quality and object of the travellers before us?" demanded the Baron de Willading of Pierre.

The latter mused. It was evident he did not expect to meet with strangers in that particular part of the passage.

"We can know little of those who come from the convent, though few would be apt to leave so safe a roof at this late hour," he answered; "but, until I saw yonder travellers with my own eyes, I could have sworn there were none on this side of the Col going the same way as ourselves! It is time that all the others were already arrived."

"They are villagers of St. Pierre going up with supplies;" observed one of the muleteers. "None bound to Italy have passed Liddes since the party of Pippo, and they by this time should be well housed at the hospice. Didst not see a dog among them?—'twas one of the Augustines' mastiffs."

"'Twas the dog I noted, and it was on ac-

count of his appearance that I spoke ;” returned the baron. “The animal had the air of an old acquaintance, Gaetano, for to me it seemed to resemble our tried friend Nettuno ; and he at whose heels it kept so close wore much the air of our acquaintance of the Lemn, the bold and ready Maso.”

“Who has gone unrequited for his eminent services !” answered the Genoese, thoughtfully. “The extraordinary refusal of that man to receive our money is quite as wonderful as any other part of his unusual and inexplicable conduct. I would he had been less obstinate or less proud, for the unrequited obligation rests like a load upon my spirits.”

“Thou art wrong. I employed our young friend Sigismund secretly on this duty, while we were receiving the greetings of Roger de Blonay and the good bailiff, but thy countryman treated the escape lightly, as the mariner is apt to consider past danger, and he would listen to no offer of protection or gold. I was,

therefore, more displeased than surprised by what thou hast well enough termed obstinacy.

“Tell your employers, he said,” added Sigismund, “that they may thank the saints, Our Lady, or brother Luther, as best suits their habits, but that they had better forget that such a man as Maso lives. His acquaintance can bring them neither honour nor advantage. Tell this especially to the Signor Grimaldi, when you are on your journey to Italy, and we have parted for ever, as on my suggestion. This was said to me, in the interview I held with the brave fellow after his liberation from prison.

“The answer was remarkable for a man of his condition, and the especial message to myself of singular exception. I observed that his eye was often on me, with peculiar meaning, during the passage of the lake, and to this hour I have not been able to explain the motive!”

“Is the Signore of Genoa?”—asked the guide; “or is he by chance, in any way connected with her authorities?”

"Of that republic and city, and certainly of some little interest with the authorities;" answered the Italian, a slight smile curling his lip, as he glanced a look at his friend.

"It is not necessary to look farther for Maso's acquaintance with your features," returned Pierre, laughing; "for of all who live in Italy, there is not a man who has more frequent occasions to know the authorities; but we linger, in this gossip. Urge the beasts upwards, Etienne—presto!—presto!"

The muleteers answered this appeal by one of their long cries, which has a resemblance to the rattling that is the well-known signal of the venomous serpent of this country when he would admonish the traveller to move quickly, and which certainly produces the same startling effect on the nerves of the mule as the signal of the snake is very apt to excite in man. This interruption caused the dialogue to be dropped, all riding onward, musing in their several fashions on what had just

passed. In a few minutes the party turned the crag in question, and, quitting the valley, or sterile basin, in which they had been journeying for the last half hour, they entered by a narrow gorge into a scene that resembled a crude collection of the materials of which the foundations of the world had been originally formed. There was no longer any vegetation at all, or, if here and there a blade of grass had put forth under the shelter of some stone, it was so meagre, and of so rare occurrence, as to be unnoticed in that sublime scene of chaotic confusion. Ferruginous, streaked, naked, and cheerless rocks arose around them, and even that snowy beacon, the glowing summit of Vélán, which had so long lain bright and cheering on their path, was now hid entirely from view. Pierre Dumont soon after pointed out a place on the visible summit of the mountain, where a gorge between the neighbouring peaks admitted a view of the heavens beyond. This he informed those he guided

was the Col, through whose opening the pile of the Alps was to be finally surmounted. The light that still tranquilly reigned in this part of the heavens was in sublime contrast to the gathering gloom of the passes below, and all hailed this first glimpse of the end of their day's toil as a harbinger of rest, and we might add of security; for, although none but the Signor Grimaldi had detected the secret uneasiness of Pierre, it was not possible to be at that late hour, amid so wild and dreary a display of desolation, and, as it were, cut off from communion with their kind, without experiencing an humbling sense of the dependence of man upon the grand and ceaseless Providence of God.

The mules were again urged to increase their pace, and images of the refreshment and repose that were expected from the convent's hospitality, became general and grateful among the travellers. The day was fast disappearing from the glens and ravines through which they rode, and all discourse ceased in the desire to get on.

The exceeding purity of the atmosphere, which, at that great elevation, resembled a medium of thought rather than of matter, rendered objects defined, just, and near ; and none but the mountaineers and Sigismund, who were used to the deception, (for in effect truth obtains this character with those who have been accustomed to the false) and who understood the grandeur of the scale on which nature has displayed her power among the Alps, knew how to calculate the distance which still separated them from their goal. More than a league of painful and stony ascent was to be surmounted, and yet Adelheid and Christine had both permitted slight exclamations of pleasure to escape them, when Pierre pointed to the speck of blue sky between the hoary pinnacles above, and first gave them to understand that it denoted the position of the convent. Here and there, too, small patches of the last year's snow were discovered, lying under the shadows of overhanging rocks, and which were likely to resist the powers of the

sun till winter came again; another certain sign that they had reached a height greatly exceeding that of the usual habitations of men. The keenness of the air was another proof of their situation, for all the travellers had heard that the Augustines dwelt among eternal frosts, a report which is nearly literally true.

At no time during the day had the industry of the party been as great as it now became. In this respect, the ordinary traveller is apt to resemble him who journeys on the great highway of life, and who finds himself obliged, by a tardy and ill-requited diligence in age, to repair those omissions and negligences of youth which would have rendered the end of his toil easy and profitable. Improved as their speed had become, it continued to increase, rather than to diminish, for Pierre Dumont kept his eye riveted on the heavens, and each moment of time seemed to bring new incentives to exertion. The wearied beasts manifested less zeal than the guide, and they who rode them were

beginning to murmur at the unreasonableness of the rate at which they were compelled to proceed on the narrow, uneven, stony path, where footing for the animals was not always obtained with the necessary quickness, when a gloom deeper than that cast by the shadows of the rocks fell upon their track, and the air filled with snow, as suddenly as if all its particles had been formed and condensed by the application of some prompt chemical process.

The change was so unexpected, and yet so complete, that the whole party checked their mules, and sat looking up at the millions of flakes that were descending on their heads, with more wonder and admiration than fear. A shout from Pierre first aroused them from this trance, and recalled them to a sense of the real state of things. He was standing on a knoll, already separated from the party by some fifty yards, white with snow, and gesticulating violently for the travellers to come on.

“ For the sake of the Blessed Maria ! quicken

the beasts," he cried ; for Pierre, like most who dwell in Valais was a catholic, and one accustomed to bethink him most of his heavenly mediator when most oppressed with present dangers ; " quicken their speed, if ye value your lives ! This is no moment to gaze at the mountains, which are well enough in their way, and no doubt both the finest and largest known," (no Swiss ever seriously vituperates or loses his profound veneration for his beloved nature,) " but which had better be the humblest plain on earth for our occasions than what they truly are. Quicken the mules then, for the love of the Blessed Virgin !"

" Thou betrayest unnecessary, and, for one that had needs be cool, indiscreet alarm, at the appearance of a little snow, friend Pierre ;" observed the Signor Grimaldi, as the mules drew near the guide, and speaking with a little of the irony of a soldier who had steeled his nerves by familiarity with danger. " Even we Italians, though less used to the frosts than you

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of the mountains, are not so much disturbed by the change, as thou, a trained guide of St. Bernard !”

“ Reproach me as you will, Signore,” said Pierre, turning and pursuing his way with increased diligence, though he did not entirely succeed in concealing his resentment at an accusation which he knew to be unmerited, “ but quicken your pace ; until you are better acquainted with the country in which you journey, your words pass for empty breath in my ears. This is no trifle of a cloak doubled about the person, or of balls rolled into piles by the sport of children ; but an affair of life or death. You are a half league in the air, Signor Genoese, in the region of storms, where the winds work their will, at times, as if infernal devils were rioting to cool themselves, and where the stoutest limbs and the firmest hearts are brought but too often to see and confess their feebleness !”

The old man had uncovered his blanched

locks in respect to the Italian, as he uttered this energetic remonstrance, and when he ended, he walked on with professional pride, as if disdaining to protect a brow that had already weathered so many tempests among the mountains.

“Cover thyself, good Pierre, I pray thee;” urged the Genoese in a tone of repentance. “I have shown the intemperance of a boy, and intemperance of a quality that little becomes my years. Thou art the best judge of the circumstances in which we are placed, and thou alone shalt lead us.”

Pierre accepted the apology with a manly but respectful reverence, continuing always to ascend with unremitting industry.

Ten gloomy and anxious minutes succeeded. During this time, the falling snows came faster and in finer flakes, while, occasionally there were fearful intimations that the winds were about to rise. At the elevation in which the travellers now found themselves, pheno-

mena, that would ordinarily be of little account, become the arbiters of fate. The escape of the caloric from the human system, at the height of six or seven thousand feet above the sea, and in the latitude of forty-six, is, under the most favourable circumstances, frequently of itself the source of inconvenience; but here were grave additional reasons to heighten the danger. The absence of the sun's rays alone left a sense of chilling cold, and a few hours of night were certain to bring frost, even at midsummer. Thus it is that storms of trifling import in themselves gain power over the human frame, by its reduced means of resistance, and when to this fact is added the knowledge that the elements are far fiercer in their workings in the upper than in the nether regions of the earth, the motives of Pierre's concern will be better understood by the reader than they probably were by himself, though the honest guide had a long and severe experience to supply the place of theory.

Men are rarely loquacious in danger. The timid recoil into themselves, yielding most of their faculties to a tormenting imagination, that augments the causes of alarm and diminishes the means of security, while the firm of mind rally and condense their powers to the point necessary to exertion. Such were the effects in the present instance on those who followed Pierre. A general and deep silence pervaded the party, each one seeing their situation in the colours most suited to his particular habits and character. The men, without an exception, were grave and earnest in their efforts to force the mules forward ; Adelheid became pale, but she preserved her calmness by the sheer force of character ; Christine was trembling and dependent, though cheered by the presence of, and her confidence in, Sigismund ; while the attendants of the heiress of Willading covered their heads, and followed their mistress with the blind faith in their superiors that is apt to sustain people of their class in serious emergencies.

Ten minutes sufficed entirely to change the aspect of the view. The frozen element could not adhere to the iron-like and perpendicular faces of the mountains, but the glens, and ravines, and valleys became as white as the peak of Vélan. Still Pierre continued his silent and upward march, in a way to keep alive a species of trembling hope among those who depended so helplessly upon his intelligence and faith. They wished to believe that the snow was merely one of those common occurrences that were to be expected on the summits of the Alps at this late season of the year, and which were no more than so many symptoms of the known rigour of the approaching winter. The guide himself was evidently disposed to lose no time in explanation, and as the secret excitement stole over all his followers, he no longer had cause to complain of the tardiness of their movements. Sigismund kept near his sister and Adelheid, having a care

that their mules did not lag; while the other males performed the same necessary office for the beasts ridden by the female domestics. In this manner passed the few sombre minutes which immediately preceded the disappearance of day. The heavens were no longer visible. In that direction the eye saw only an endless succession of falling flakes, and it was getting to be difficult to distinguish even the ramparts of rock that bounded the irregular ravine in which they rode. They were known to be, however, at no great distance from the path, which indeed occasionally brushed their sides. At other moments they crossed rude, stony, mountain heaths, if such a word can be applied to spots without the symbol or hope of vegetation. The traces of the beasts that had preceded them, became less and less apparent, though the trickling stream that came down from the glaciers, and along which they had now journeyed for hours, was oc-

casionally seen, as it was crossed in pursuing their winding way. Pierre, though still confident that he held the true direction, alone knew that this guide was not longer to be relied on, for, as they drew nearer to the top of the mountains, the torrent gradually lessened both in its force and in the volume of its water, separating into twenty small rills, which came rippling from the vast bodies of snow that lay among the different peaks above.

As yet, there had been no wind. The guide, as minute after minute passed without bringing any change in this respect, ventured at last to advert to the fact, cheering his companions by giving them reasons to hope that they should yet reach the convent without any serious calamity. As if in mockery of this opinion, the flakes of snow began to whirl in the air, while the words were on his lips, and a blast came through the ravine, that set the protection of cloaks and mantles at defiance.

Notwithstanding his resolution and experience the stout-hearted Pierre suffered an exclamation of despair to escape him, and he instantly stopped, in the manner of a man who could no longer conceal the dread that had been collecting in his bosom for the last interminable and weary hour. Sigismund, as well as most of the men of the party, had dismounted a little previously, with a view to excite warmth by exercise. The youth had often traversed the mountains, and the cry no sooner reached his ear than he was at the side of him who uttered it.

“At what distance are we still from the convent?” he demanded eagerly.

“There is more than a league of steep and stony path to mount, Monsieur le Capitaine;” returned the disconsolate Pierre, in a tone that perhaps said more than his words.

“This is not a moment for indecision. Remember that thou art not the leader of a party of carriers with their beasts of burthen, but

that there are those with us who are unused to exposure, and are feeble of body. What is the distance from the last hamlet we passed?"

"Double that to the convent!"

Sigismund turned, and with the eye he made a silent appeal to the two old nobles, as if to ask for advice or orders.

"It might indeed be better to return," observed the Signor Grimaldi, in the way one utters a half-formed resolution. "This wind is getting to be piercingly cutting, and the night is hard upon us. What thinkest thou, Melchior; for with Monsieur Sigismund I am of opinion that there is little time to lose."

"Ignore, your pardon," hastily interrupted the guide. "I would not undertake to cross the plain of the Velan an hour later, for all the treasures of Einsiedeln and Loretto! The wind will have an infernal sweep in that basin, which will soon be boiling like a pot, while here we shall get, from time to time, the shelter

of the rocks. The slightest mishap on the open ground might lead us astray a league or more, and it would need an hour to regain the course. The beasts too mount faster than they descend and with far more surety in the dark, and even when at the village there is nothing fit for nobles, while the brave monks have all that a king can need."

"Those who escape from these wild rocks need not be critical about their fare, honest Pierre, when fairly housed. Wilt thou answer for our arrival at the convent unharmed and in reasonable time?"

"Signore, we are in the hands of God. The pious Augustines, I make no doubt, are praying for all who are on the mountain at this moment; but there is not a minute to lose. I ask no more than that none lose sight of their companions, and that each exert his force to the utmost. We are not far from the House of Refuge, and should the storm increase to a tempest, as, to conceal the danger no longer

well may happen in this late month, we will seek its shelter for a few hours."

This intelligence was happily communicated, for the certainty that there was a place of safety within an attainable distance, had some such cheering effect on the travellers as is produced on the mariner who finds that the hazards of the gale are lessened by the accidental position of a secure harbour under his lee. Repeating his admonitions for the party to keep as close together as possible, and advising all who felt the sinister effects of the cold on their limbs to dismount, and to endeavour to restore the circulation by exercise, Pierre resumed his route.

But even the time consumed in this short conference had sensibly altered the condition of things for the worse. The wind, which had no fixed direction, being a furious current of the upper air diverted from its true course by encountering the ragged peaks and ravines of the Alps, was now whirling around them in eddies, now aiding their ascent by seeming to

push against their backs, and then returning in their faces with a violence that actually rendered advance impossible. The temperature fell rapidly several degrees, and the most vigorous of the party began to perceive the benumbing influence of the chilling currents, at their lower extremities especially, in a manner to excite serious alarm. Every precaution that tenderness could suggest was used to protect the females; but though Adelheid, who alone retained sufficient self-command to give an account of her feelings, diminished the danger of their situation with the wish not to alarm her companions uselessly, she could not conceal from herself the horrible truth that the vital heat was escaping from her own body, with a rapidity that rendered it impossible for her much longer to retain the use of her faculties. Conscious of her own mental superiority over that of all her female companions, a superiority which, in such moments, is even of more account than bodily force, after

a few minutes of silent endurance, she checked her mule, and called upon Sigismund to examine the condition of his sister and her maids, neither of whom had now spoken for some time.

This startling request was made at a moment when the storm appeared to gather new force, and when it had become absolutely impossible to distinguish even the whitened earth at twenty paces from the spot where the party stood collected in a shivering group. The young soldier threw open the cloaks and mantles in which Christine was enveloped, and the half-unconscious girl sank on his shoulder, like a drowsy infant that is willing to seek its slumbers in the arms of one it loves.

Christine!—my sister!—my poor, my much-abused, angelic sister!” murmured Sigismund, happily for his secret in a voice that only reached the ears of Adelheid. “Awake! Christine; for the love of our excellent and affection-

ate mother, exert thyself. Awake ! Christine, in the name of God, awake !”

“Awake, dearest Christine !” exclaimed Adelheid, throwing herself from the saddle, and folding the smiling but benumbed girl to her bosom. “God protect me from the pang of feeling that thy loss should be owing to my wish to lead thee amid these cruel and inhospitable rocks ! Christine, if thou hast love or pity for me, awake !”

“Look to the maids !” hurriedly said Pierre, who found that he was fast touching on one of those mountain catastrophes, of which, in the course of his life, he had been the witness of a few of fearful consequences. “Look to all the females, for he who now sleeps, dies !”

The muleteers soon stripped the two domestics of their outer coverings, and it was immediately proclaimed that both were in imminent danger, one having already lost all con-

sciousness. A timely application of the flask of Pierre, and the efforts of the muleteers, succeeded so far in restoring life as to remove the grounds of immediate apprehension, though it was apparent to the least instructed of them all, that half an hour more of exposure would probably complete the fatal work that had so actively and vigorously commenced. To add to the horror of this conviction, each member of the party, not excepting the muleteers, was painfully conscious of the escape of that vital warmth whose total flight was death.

In this strait all dismounted. They felt that the occasion was one of extreme jeopardy, that nothing could save them but resolution, and that every minute of time was getting to be of the last importance. Each female, Adelheid included, was placed between two of the other sex, and, supported in this manner, Pierre called loudly and in a manful voice for the whole to proceed. The beasts were driven after them by one of the muleteers. The progress

of travellers, feeble as Adelheid and her companions, on a stony path of very uneven surface, and of a steep ascent, the snow covering the feet, and the tempest cutting their faces, was necessarily slow and to the last degree toilsome. Still, the exertion increased the quickness of the blood, and, for a short time, there was an appearance of recalling those who most suffered to life. Pierre, who still kept his post with the hardihood of a mountaineer and the fidelity of a Swiss, cheered them on with his voice, continuing to raise the hope that the place of refuge was at hand.

At this instant, when exertion was most needed, and when, apparently, all were sensible of its importance and most disposed to make it, the muleteer charged with the duty of urging on the line of beasts deserted his trust, preferring to take his chance of regaining the village by descending the mountain to struggling uselessly, and at a pace so slow, to reach the convent. The man was a stranger in the country,

who had been adventitiously employed for this expedition, and was unconnected with Pierre by any of those ties which are the best pledges of unconquerable faith, when the interests of self press hard upon our weaknesses. The wearied beasts, no longer driven, and indisposed to toil, first stopped, then turned aside to avoid the cutting air and the ascent, and were soon wandering from the path it was so vitally necessary to keep.

As soon as Pierre was informed of the circumstance, he eagerly issued an order to collect the stragglers without delay and at every hazard. Benumbed, bewildered, and unable to see beyond a few yards, this embarrassing duty was not easily performed. One after another of the party joined in the pursuit, for all the effects of the travellers were on the beasts; and, after some ten minutes of delay, blended with an excitement which helped to quicken the blood and to awaken the faculties of even the females, the mules were all happily

regained. They were secured to each other, head and tail, in the manner so usual in the droves of these animals, and Pierre turned to resume the order of the march. But on seeking the path, it was not to be found ! Search was made on every side, and yet none could meet with the smallest of its traces. Broken, rough fragments of rock were all that rewarded the most anxious investigation ; and, after a few precious minutes uselessly wasted, they all assembled around the guide, as if by common consent, to seek his counsel. The truth was no longer to be concealed—the party was lost !

CHAPTER III.

Let no presuming railer tax
Creative wisdom, as if aught was formed
In vain, or not for admirable ends.

THOMSON.

So long as we possess the power to struggle, hope is the last feeling to desert the human mind. Men are endowed with every gradation of courage, from the calm energy of reflection, which is rendered still more effective by physical firmness, to the headlong precipitation of a reckless spirit; from the resolution that grows more imposing and more respectable as there is greater occasion for its exercise, to the fearful and ill-directed energies of

despair. But no description with the pen can give the reader a just idea of the chill that comes over the heart when accidental causes rob us, suddenly and without notice, of those resources on which we have been habitually accustomed to rely. The mariner without his course or compass loses his audacity and coolness, though the momentary danger be the same; the soldier will fly if you deprive him of his arms; and the hunter of our own forests, who has lost his landmarks, is transformed from the bold and determined foe of its tenants into an anxious and dependent fugitive, timidly seeking the means of retreat. In short, the customary associations of the mind being rudely and suddenly destroyed, we are made to feel that reason, while it elevates us so far above the brutes as to make man their lord and governor, becomes a quality less valuable than instinct, when the connecting link in its chain of causes and effects is severed.

It was no more than a natural consequence of

his greater experience, that Pierre Dumont understood the horrors of their present situation far better than any with him. It is true there yet remained enough light to enable him to pick his way over the rocks and stones, but he had sufficient experience to understand that there was less risk in remaining stationary than in moving, for while there was only one direction that led towards the Refuge, all the rest would conduct them to a greater distance from the shelter, which was now the only hope. On the other hand, a very few minutes of the intense cold and of the searching wind to which they were exposed, would most probably freeze the currents of life in the feeblers of those entrusted to his care.

“Hast thou aught to advise?” asked Melchior de Willading, folding Adelheid to his bosom, beneath his ample cloak, and communicating, with a father’s love, a small portion of the meagre warmth that still remained in his own aged frame to that of his drooping daughter—

"canst thou bethink thee of nothing, that may be done, in this awful strait?"

"If the good monks have been active—" returned the wavering Pierre. "I fear me that the dogs have not yet been exercised, on the paths, this season!"

"Has it then come to this! Are our lives indeed dependent on the uncertain sagacity of brutes!"

"Mein Herr, I would bless the Virgin and her holy Son if it were so! But I fear this storm has been so sudden and unexpected that we may not even hope for their succour."

Melchior groaned. He folded his child still nearer to his heart, while the athletic Sigismund shielded his drooping sister, as the fowl shelters its young beneath the wing.

"Delay is death;" rejoined the Signor Grimaldi. "I have heard of muleteers that have been driven to kill their beasts, that shelter and warmth might be found in their entrails."

"The alternative is horrible!" interrupted

Sigismund. "Is return impossible? By always descending, we must in time reach the village below."

"That time would be fatal;" answered Pierre. "I know of only one resource that remains. If the party will keep together, and answer my shouts, I will make another effort to find the path."

This proposal was gladly accepted, for energy and hope go hand in hand, and the guide was about to quit the group, when he felt the strong grasp of Sigismund on his arm.

"I will be thy companion;" said the soldier, firmly.

"Thou hast not done me justice, young man," answered Pierre, with severe reproach in his manner. "Had I been base enough to desert my trust, these limbs and this strength are yet sufficient to carry me safely down the mountain; but, though a guide of the Alps may freeze like another man, the last

throb of his heart will be in behalf of those he serves !”

“ A thousand pardons, brave old man—a thousand pardons ; still will I be thy companion ; the search that is conducted by two will be more likely to succeed than that on which thou goest alone.”

The offended Pierre, who liked the spirit of the youth as much as he disliked his previous suspicions, met the apology frankly. He extended his hand and forgot the feelings, that, even amid the tempests of those wild mountains, were excited by a distrust of his honesty. After this short concession to the ever-burning, though smothered, volcano of human passion, they left the group together in order to make a last search for their course.

The snow by this time was many inches deep, and, as the road was at best but a faint bridle-path that could scarcely be distinguished by day-light from the débris which strewed the

ravines, the undertaking would have been utterly hopeless, had not Pierre known that there was the chance of still meeting with some signs of the many mules that daily went up and down the mountain. The guide called to the muleteers, who answered his cries every minute, for so long as they kept within the sound of each other's voices there was no danger of their becoming entirely separated. But, amid the hollow roaring of the wind and the incessant pelting of the storm, it was neither safe nor practicable to venture far asunder. Several little stony knolls were ascended and descended, and a rippling rill was found, but without bringing with it any traces of the path. The heart of Pierre began to chill with the decreasing warmth of his body, and the firm old man, overwhelmed with his responsibility, while his truant thoughts would unbidden recur to those whom he had left in his cottage at the foot of the mountain, gave way at last to his emotions in a paroxysm of grief, wring-

ing his hands, weeping, and calling loudly on God for succour. This fearful evidence of their extremity worked upon the feelings of Sigismund until they were wrought up nearly to frenzy. His great physical force still sustained him, and, in an access of energy that was fearfully allied to madness, he rushed forward into the vortex of snow and hail, as if determined to leave all to the Providence of God, disappearing from the eyes of his companion. This incident recalled the guide to his senses. He called earnestly on the thoughtless youth to return. No answer was given, and Pierre hastened back to the motionless and shivering party, in order to unite all their voices in a last effort to be heard. Cry upon cry was raised, but each shout was answered merely by the hoarse rushing of the winds.

“Sigismund! Sigismund!” called one after another, in hurried and alarmed succession.

“The noble boy will be irretrievably lost!” exclaimed the Signor Grimaldi, in despair,

the services already rendered by the youth, together with his manly qualities having insensibly and closely wound themselves around his heart. "He will die a miserable death, and without the consolation of meeting his fate in communion with his fellow-sufferers!"

A shout from Sigismund came whirling past, as if the sound were embodied with the gale.

"Blessed Ruler of the earth, this is alone thy mercy!" exclaimed Melchior de Willading, "he has found the path!"

"And honour to thee, Maria—thou mother of God!" murmured the Italian.

At that moment, a dog came leaping and barking through the snow. It was immediately scenting and whining among the frozen travellers. The exclamations of joy and surprise were scarcely uttered before Sigismund, accompanied by another, joined the party."

"Honour and thanks to the good Augustines!" cried the delighted guide; "this is the third good office of the kind, for which I am their debtor."

“ I would it were true, honest Pierre” answered the stranger. “ But Maso and Nettuno are poor substitutes in a tempest like this for the servants and beasts of St. Bernard. I am a wanderer, and lost like yourselves, and my presence brings little other relief than that which is known to be the fruit of companionship in misery. The saints have brought me a second time into your company when matters are hanging between life and death !”

Maso made this last remark when, by drawing nearer to the group, he had been able to ascertain, by the remains of the light, of whom the party was composed.

“ If it is to be as useful now as thou hast already been,” answered the Genoese, “ it will be happier for us all, thyself included ; bethink thee quickly of thy expedients, and I will make thee an equal sharer of all that a generous Providence hath bestowed.”

Il Maledetto rarely listened to the voice of the Signor Grimaldi without a manner of inte-

rest and curiosity which, as already mentioned, had more than once struck the latter himself, but which he quite naturally attributed to the circumstance of his person being known to one who had declared himself to be a native of Genoa. Even at this terrible moment, the same manner was evident, and the noble, thinking it a favourable symptom, renewed the already neglected offers of fortune, with a view to quicken a zeal which he reasonably enough supposed would be most likely to be awakened by the hopes of a substantial reward.

“Were there question here, illustrious Signore,” answered Maso, “of steering a barge, of shortening sail, or of handling a craft of any rig or construction, in gale, squall, hurricane, or a calm among breakers, my skill and experience might be turned to good account; but, setting aside the difference in our strength and hardihood, even that lily which is in so much danger of being nipped by the frosts, is not more helpless than I am myself at this moment. I am

no better than yourselves, Signori, and, though a better mountaineer perhaps, I rely on the favour of the saints to be succoured, or my time must finish among the snows instead of in the surf of a sea-shore, as, until now, I had always believed would be my fate.

“ But the dog—thy admirable dog !”

“ Ah, eccellenza, Nettuno is but a useless beast, here ! God has given to him a thicker mantle and a warmer dress than to us christians, but even this advantage will soon prove a curse to my poor friend. The long hair he carries will quickly be covered with icicles, and as the snow deepens it will retard his movements. The dogs of St. Bernard are smoother, have longer limbs, a truer scent, and possess the advantage of being trained to the paths.”

A tremendous shout of Sigismund's interrupted Maso, the youth, on finding that the accidental meeting with the mariner was not likely to lead to any immediate advantages, having

instantly, accompanied by Pierre and one of his assistants, renewed the search. The cry was echoed from the guide and the muleteer, and then all three were seen flying through the snow, preceded by a powerful mastiff. Nettuno, who had been crouching with his bushy tail between his legs, barked, seemed to arouse with renewed courage, and then leaped with evident joy and good-will upon the back of his old antagonist Uberto.

The dog of St. Bernard was alone. But his air and all his actions were those of an animal whose consciousness was wrought up to the highest pitch permitted by the limits nature had set to the intelligence of a brute. He ran from one to another, rubbed his glossy and solid side against the limbs of all, wagged his tail, and betrayed the usual signs that creatures of his species manifest when their instinct is most alive. Luckily he had a good interpreter of his meaning in the guide, who, knowing the habits, and, if it may be so ex-

pressed, the intentions of the mastiff, feeling there was not a moment to lose if they would still preserve the feebler members of their party, begged the others to hasten the necessary dispositions to profit by this happy meeting. The females were supported as before, the mules fastened together, and Pierre, placing himself in front, called cheerfully to the dog, encouraging him to lead the way.

“Is it quite prudent to confide so implicitly to the guidance of this brute?” asked the Signor Grimaldi a little doubtingly, when he saw the arrangement on which, by the increasing gloom and the growing intensity of the cold, it was but too apparent, even to one as little accustomed to the mountains as himself, that the lives of the whole party depended.

“Fear not to trust to old Uberto, Signore,” answered Pierre, moving onward as he spoke, for to think of further delay was out of the question; “fear nothing for the faith, or the knowledge of the dog. These animals are

trained by the servants of the convent to know and to keep the paths, even when the snows lie on them fathoms deep. God has given them stout hearts, long limbs, and short hair expressly, as it has often seemed to me, for this end; and nobly do they use the gifts! I am acquainted with all their ways, for we guides commonly learn the ravines of St. Bernard by first serving the clavier of the convent, and many a day have I gone up and down these rocks with a couple of the animals in training for this very purpose. The father and mother of Uberto were my favourite companions, and their son will hardly play an old friend of the family false."

The travellers followed their leader with more confidence, though blindly. Uberto appeared to perform his duty with the sobriety and steadiness that became his years, and which, indeed, were very necessary for the circumstances in which they were placed. Instead of bounding ahead and becoming lost to view,

as most probably would have happened with a younger animal, the noble and half-reasoning brute maintained a pace that was suited to the slow march of those who supported the females, occasionally stopping to look back, as if to make sure that none were left.

The dogs of St. Bernard are, or it might perhaps be better to say were—for it is affirmed that the ancient race is lost,—chosen for their size, their limbs, and the shortness of their coats, as has just been stated by Pierre; the former being necessary to convey the succour with which they were often charged, as well as to overcome the difficulties of the mountains, and the two latter that they might the better wade through, and resist the influence of, the snows. Their training consisted in rendering them familiar with, and attached to, the human race; in teaching them to know and to keep the paths on all occasions, except such as called for a higher exercise of their instinct, and to discover the position of those who had been

overwhelmed by the avalanches, and to assist in disinterring their bodies. In all these duties Uberto had been so long exercised, that he was universally known to be the most sagacious and the most trusty animal on the mountain. Pierre followed his steps with so much greater reliance on his intelligence, from being perfectly acquainted with the character of the dog. When, therefore, he saw the mastiff turn at right angles to the course he had just been taking, the guide, on reaching the spot, imitated his example, and, first removing the snow to make sure of the fact, he joyfully proclaimed to those who came after him that the lost path was found. This intelligence sounded like a reprieve from death, though the mountaineers well knew that more than an hour of painful and increasing toil was still necessary to reach the hospice. The chilled blood of the tender beings who were fast dropping into the terrible sleep which is the forerunner of death, was quickened in their veins, however,

when they heard the shout of delight that spontaneously broke from all their male companions, on learning the glad tidings.

The movement was now faster, though embarrassed and difficult on account of the incessant pelting of the storm and the influence of the biting cold, which were difficult to be withstood by even the strongest of the party. Sigismund groaned inwardly, as he thought of Adelheid and his sister's being exposed to a tempest which shook the stoutest frame and the most manly heart among them. He encircled the latter with an arm, rather carrying than leading her along, for the young soldier had sufficient knowledge of the localities of the mountain to understand that they were still at a fearful distance from the col, and that the strength of Christine was absolutely unequal to the task of reaching it unsupported.

Occasionally Pierre spoke to the dogs, Nettuno keeping close to the side of Uberto in order to prevent separation, since the path was

no longer discernible without constant examination, the darkness having so far increased as to reduce the sight to very narrow limits. Each time the name of the latter was pronounced, the animal would stop, wag his tail, or give some other sign of recognition, as if to reassure his followers of his intelligence and fidelity. After one of these short halts, old Uberto and his companion unexpectedly refused to proceed. The guide, the two old nobles, and at length the whole party, were around them, and no cry or encouragement of the mountaineers could induce the dogs to quit their tracks.

“Are we again lost?” asked the Baron de Willading, pressing Adelheid closer to his beating heart, nearly ready to submit to their common fate in despair. “Has God at length forsaken us? — my daughter — my beloved child!”

This touching appeal was answered by a howl from Uberto, who leaped madly away and disappeared. Nettuno followed, barking

wildly and with a deep throat. Pierre did not hesitate about following, and Sigismund, believing that the movement of the guide was to arrest the flight of the dogs, was quickly on his heels. Maso moved with greater deliberation.

“ Nettuno is not apt to raise that bark with nothing but hail, and snow, and wind in his nostrils;” said the calculating Italian. “ We are either near another party of travellers, for such are on the mountains as I know——”

“ God forbid ! Art sure of this ?” demanded the Signor Grimaldi, observing that the other had suddenly checked himself.

“ Sure that others *were*, Signore,” returned the mariner deliberately, as if he measured well the meaning of each word. “ Ah, here comes the trusty beast, and Pierre, and the Captain, with their tidings, be they good or be they evil.”

The two just named rejoined their friends as Maso ceased speaking. They hurriedly informed the shivering travellers that the much

desired refuge was near, and that nothing but the darkness and the driving snow prevented it from being seen.

“It was a blessed thought, and one that came from St. Augustine himself, which led the holy monks to raise this shelter!” exclaimed the delighted Pierre, no longer considering it necessary to conceal the extent of the danger they had run. “I would not answer even for my own power to reach the hospice in a time like this. You are of mother church, Signore, being of Italy?”

“I am one of her unworthy children;” returned the Genoese.

“This unmerited favour must have come from the prayers of St. Augustine, and a vow I made to send a fair offering to our Lady of Einsiedeln; for never before have I known a dog of St. Bernard lead the traveller to the refuge! Their business is to find the frozen and to guide the traveller along the paths to the hospice. Even Uberto had his doubts, as you

saw, but the vow prevailed ; or, I know not—it might, indeed, have been the prayer.”

The Signor Grimaldi was too eager to get Adelheid under cover, and in good sooth, to be there himself, to waste the time in discussing the knotty point of which of two means that were equally orthodox, had been the most efficacious in bringing about their rescue. In common with the others, he followed the pious and confiding Pierre in silence, making the best of his way after the credulous guide. The latter had not yet seen the refuge himself, for so these places are well termed on the Alpine passes, but the formation of the ground had satisfied him of its proximity. Once reassured as to his precise position, all the surrounding localities presented themselves to his mind with the familiarity the seaman manifests with every cord in the intricate maze of his rigging, in the darkest night, or, to produce a parallel of more common use, with the readiness which all manifest in the intricacies of their own habitations. The

broken chain of association being repaired and joined, every thing became clear again to his apprehension, and, in diverging from the path on this occasion, the old man held his way as directly toward the spot he sought, as if he were journeying under a bright sun. There was a rough but short descent, a similar rise, and the long-desired goal was reached.

We shall not stop to dwell upon the emotions with which the travellers first touched this place of comparative security. Humility, and dependence on the providence of God, were the predominant sensations even with the rude muleteers, while the nearly exhausted females were just able to express in murmurs their fervent gratitude to the omnipotent power that had permitted its agents so unexpectedly to interpose between them and death. The refuge was not seen until Pierre laid his hand on the roof, now white with snow, and proclaimed its character with a loud, warm, and devout thanksgiving.

“Enter and thank God!” he said. “Another hopeless half hour would have brought down

from his pride the stoutest among us—enter, and thank God !”

As is the fact with all the edifices of that region, the building was entirely of stone, even to the roof, having the form of those vaulted cellars which in this country are used for the preservation of vegetables. It was quite free from humidity, however, the clearness of the atmosphere and the entire absence of soil preventing the accumulation of moisture, and it offered no more than the naked protection of its walls to those who sought its cover. But shelter on such a night was everything, and this it effectually afforded. The place had only one outlet, being simply formed of four walls and the roof ; but it was sufficiently large to shelter a party twice as numerous as that which had now reached it.

The transition from the biting cold and piercing winds of the mountain to the shelter of this inartificial building, was so great as to produce something like a general sensation of warmth. The advantage gained in this change

of feeling was judiciously improved by the application of friction and of restoratives under the direction of Pierre. Uberto carried a small supply of the latter attached to his collar, and before half an hour had passed, Adelheid and Christine were sleeping sweetly, side by side, muffled in plenty of the spare garments, and pillowed on the saddles and housings of the mules. The brutes were brought within the refuge, and as no party mounted the St. Bernard without carrying the provender necessary for its beasts of burthen, that sterile region affording none of its own, the very fuel being transported leagues on the backs of mules, the patient and hardy animals, too, found their solace, after the fatigues and exposure of the day. The presence of so many living bodies in lodgings so confined aided in producing warmth, and, after all had eaten of the scanty fare furnished by the foresight of the guide, drowsiness came over the whole party.

CHAPTER IV.

Side by side,
Within they lie, a mournful company.
ROGERS.

THE sleep of the weary is sweet. In after-life, Adelheid, when dwelling in a palace, reposing on down, and canopied by the rich stuffs of a more generous climate, was often heard to say that she had never taken rest grateful as that she found in the refuge of St. Bernard. So easy, natural, and refreshing, had been her slumbers, unalloyed even by those dreams of precipices and avalanches which, long afterwards, haunted her slumbers, that she was the first to open her eyes on the following morning, awaking like an infant that had enjoyed a quiet

and healthful repose. Her movements aroused Christine. They threw aside the cloaks and coats that covered them, and sat gazing about the place in the confusion that the novelty of their situation would be likely to produce. All the rest of the travellers still slumbered; and, arising without noise, they passed the silent and insensible sleepers, the quiet mules which had stretched themselves near the entrance of the place, and quitted the hut.

Without, the scene was wintry; but, as is usual in the Alps let what may be the season, its features of grand and imposing sublimity were prominent. The day was among the peaks above them, while the shades of night still lay upon the valleys, forming a landscape like that exquisite and poetical picture of the lower world, which Guido has given in the celebrated al-fresco painting of Aurora. The ravines and glens were covered with snow, but the sides of the rugged rocks were bare in their eternal hue of ferruginous brown. The

little knoll on which the refuge stood was also nearly naked, the wind having driven the light particles of the snow into the ravine of the path. The air of the morning is keen at that great height even in midsummer, and the shivering girls drew their mantles about them, though they breathed the clear, elastic, inspiring element with pleasure. The storm was entirely past, and the pure sapphire-coloured sky was in lovely contrast with the shadows beneath, raising their thoughts naturally to that heaven which shone in a peace and glory so much in harmony with the ordinary images we shadow forth of the abode of the blessed. Adelheid pressed the hand of Christine, and they knelt together, bowing their heads to a rock. As fervent, pure, and sincere orisons ascended to God, from these pious and innocent spirits, as it belongs to poor mortality to offer.

This general, and in their peculiar situation especial, duty performed, the gentle girls felt more assured. Relieved of a heavy and im-

perative obligation, they ventured to look about them with greater confidence. Another building, similar in form and material to that in which their companions were still sleeping, stood on the same swell of rock, and their first inquiries naturally took that direction. The entrance, or outlet to this hut, was an orifice that resembled a window rather than a door. They moved cautiously to the spot, looking into the gloomy, cavern-like room, as timidly as the hare throws his regards about him before he ventures from his cover. Four human forms were reposing deep in the vault, with their backs sustained against the walls. They slept profoundly too, for the curious but startled girls gazed at them long, and retired without causing them to awake.

“We have not been alone on the mountain in this terrible night,” whispered Adelheid, gently urging the trembling Christine away from the spot; “thou seest that other travellers have been taking their rest near us;

most probably after perils and fatigues like our own."

Christine drew closer to the side of her more experienced friend, like the young of the dove hovering near the mother-bird when first venturing from the nest, and they returned to the refuge they had quitted, for the cold was still so intense as to render its protection grateful. At the door they were met by Pierre, the vigilant old man having awakened as soon as the light crossed his eyes.

"We are not alone here;" said Adelheid, pointing to the other stone-covered roof—"there are travellers sleeping in yonder building, too."

"Their sleep will be long, lady;" answered the guide, shaking his head solemnly. "With two of them it has already lasted a twelve-month, and the third has slept where you saw him since the fall of the avalanche in the last days of April."

Adelheid recoiled a step, for his meaning was too plain to be misunderstood. After looking

at her gentle companion, she demanded if those they had seen were in truth the bodies of travellers who had perished on the mountain.

“Of no other, lady,” returned Pierre. “This hut is for the living — that for the dead. So near are the two to each other, when men journey on these wild rocks in winter ! I have known him who passed a short and troubled night here, begin a sleep in the other before the turn of the day that is not only deep enough, but which will last for ever. One of the three that thou hast just seen was a guide like myself : he was buried in the falling snow at the spot where the path leaves the plain of Vélán below us. Another is a pilgrim that perished in as clear a night as ever shone on St. Bernard, and merely for having taken a cup too much to cheer his way. The third is a poor vine-dresser that was coming from Piedmont into our Swiss valleys to follow his calling, when death overtook him in an ill-advised slumber, in which he was so unwise as to in-

dulge at nightfall. I found his body myself on that naked rock, the day after we had drunk together in friendship at Aosta, and with my own hands was he placed among the others."

"And such is the burial a Christian gets in this inhospitable country!"

"What would you, lady!—'tis the chance of the poor and the unknown. Those that have friends are sought and found; but those that die without leaving traces of their origin fare as you see. The spade is useless among these rocks; and then it is better that the body should remain where it may be seen and claimed, than it should be put out of sight. The good fathers, and all of note, are taken down into the valleys, where there is earth, and are decently buried; while the poor and the stranger are housed in this vault, which is a better cover than many of them knew while living. Ay, there are three Christians there, who were all lately walking the earth in the flesh, gay and active as any."

“ The bodies are four in number !”

Pierre looked surprised ; he mused a little, and continued his employment.

“ Then another has perished. The time may come when my own blood shall freeze. This is a fate the guide must ever keep in mind, for he is exposed to it at an hour and a season that he knows not !”

Adelheid pursued the subject no farther. She remembered to have heard that the pure atmosphere of the mountain prevented that offensive decay which is usually associated with the idea of death, and the usage lost some of its horror in the recollection.

In the mean time the remainder of the party awoke, and were collecting before the refuge. The mules were led forth and saddled, the baggage was loaded, and Pierre was calling upon the travellers to mount, when Uberto and Nettuno came leaping down the path in company, running side by side in excellent fellowship. The movements of the dogs were

of a nature to attract the attention of Pierre and the muleteers, who predicted that they should soon see some of the servants of the hospice. The result showed the familiarity of the guide with his duty, for he had scarce ventured this opinion, when a party from the gorge on the summit of the mountain was seen wading through the snow, along the path that led towards the refuge, with Father Xavier at its head.

The explanations were brief and natural. After conducting the travellers to the shelter, and passing most of the night in their company, at the approach of dawn Uberto had returned to the convent, always attended by his friend Nettuno. Here he communicated to the monks, by signs which they who were accustomed to the habits of the animal were not slow in interpreting, that travellers were on the mountain. The good clavier knew that the party of the Baron de Willading was about to cross the col, for he had hurried home to be in readiness

to receive them ; and foreseeing the probability that they had been overtaken by the storm of the previous night, he was foremost in joining the servants who went forth to their succour. The little flask of cordial, too, had been removed from the collar of Uberto, leaving no doubt of its contents having been used, and, as nothing was more probable than that the travellers should seek a cover, their steps were directed towards the refuge as a matter of course.

The worthy clavier made this explanation with eyes that glistened with moisture, occasionally interrupting himself to murmur a prayer of thanksgiving. He passed from one of the party to the other, not even neglecting the muleteers, examining their limbs, and more especially their ears, to see that they had quite escaped the influence of the frost, and was only happy when assured by his own observation that the terrible danger they had run was not likely to be attended by any injurious consequences.

“We are accustomed to see many accidents of this nature,” he said, smilingly, when the examination was satisfactorily ended, “and practice has made us quick of sight in these matters. The blessed Maria be praised, and adoration to her holy Son, that you have all got through the night so well! There is a warm breakfast in readiness in the convent kitchen, and one solemn duty performed, we will go up the rocks to enjoy it. The little building near us is the last earthly abode of those who perish on this side the mountain, and whose remains are unclaimed. None of our canons pass the spot without offering a prayer in behalf of their souls. Kneel with me, then, you that have so much reason to be grateful to God, and join in the petition.”

Father Xavier knelt on the rocks, and all the catholics of the party united with him in the prayer for the dead. The Baron de Willading, his daughter and their attendants stood uncovered the while, for though their protestant

opinions rejected such a mediation as useless, they deeply felt the solemnity and holy character of the sacrifice. The clavier arose with a countenance that was beaming and bright as the morning sun which, just at that moment, appeared above the summits of the Alps, casting its genial and bland warmth on the group, the brown huts, and the mountain side.

“Thou art a heretic,” he said affectionately to Adelheid, in whom he felt the interest, to which her youth and beauty, and the great danger they had so lately run in company very naturally gave birth. “Thou art an impenitent heretic, but we will not cast thee off; notwithstanding thy obstinacy and crimes thou seest that the saints can interest themselves in the behalf of obstinate sinners, or thou and all with thee would have surely been lost.”

This was said in a way to draw a smile from Adelheid, who received his accusations as so many friendly and playful reproaches. As a

token of peace between them, she offered her hand to the monk, with a request that he would aid her in getting into the saddle.

“Dost thou remark the brutes!” said the Signor Grimaldi, pointing to the animals, who were gravely seated before the window of the bone-house, with relaxed jaws, keeping their eyes riveted on its entrance, or window. “Thy St. Bernard dogs, father, seem trained to serve a christian in all ways, whether living or dead.”

“Their quiet attitude and decent attention might indeed justify such a remark! Didst thou ever note such conduct in Uberto before?” returned the Augustine, addressing the servants of the convent, for the actions of the animals were a study and a subject of great interest to all of St. Bernard.

“They tell me that another fresh body has been put into the house, since I last came down the mountain,” remarked Pierre, who was quietly disposing of a mule in a manner more

favourable for Adelheid to mount: "the mastiff scents the dead. It was this that brought him to the refuge last night, Heaven be praised for the mercy!"

This was said with the indifference that habit is apt to create, for the usage of leaving bodies uninterred had no influence on the feelings of the guide, but it did not the less strike those who had descended from the convent.

"Thou art the last that came down thyself," said one of the servants; "nor have any come up, but those who are now safe in the convent, taking their rest after last night's tempest."

"How canst utter this idle nonsense, Henri, when a fresh body is in the house! This lady counted them but now, and there are four; three was the number that I showed the Piedmontese noble whom I led from Aoste, the day thou meanest!"

"Look to this," said the clavier, turning abruptly away from Adelheid, whom he was on the point of helping into the saddle.

The men entered the gloomy vault, whence they soon returned bearing a body, which they placed with its back against the wall of the building, in the open air. A cloak was over the head and face, as if the garment had been thus arranged to exclude the cold.

“He hath perished the past night, mistaking the bone-house for the refuge!” exclaimed the clavier: “Maria and her son intercede for his soul!”

“Is the unfortunate man truly dead?” asked the Genoese with more of worldly care, and with greater practice in the investigation of facts. “The frozen sleep long before the currents of life cease entirely to run.”

The Augustine commanded his followers to remove the cloak, though with little hope that the suggestion of the other would prove true. When the cloth was raised, the collapsed and pallid features of one in whom life was unequivocally extinct were exposed to view. Unlike most of those that perish of cold, who usually

sink into the long sleep of eternity by a gradual numbness and a slowly increasing unconsciousness, there was an expression of pain in the countenance of the stranger which seemed to announce that his parting struggles had been severe, and that he had resigned his hold of that mysterious principle which connects the soul to the body, with anguish. A shriek from Christine interrupted the awful gaze of the travellers, and drew their looks in another direction. She was clinging to the neck of Adelheid, her arms appearing to writhe with the effort to incorporate their two bodies into one.

“It is he! it is he!” muttered the frightened and half frantic girl, burying her pale face in the bosom of her friend. “Oh! God!—it is he!”

“Of whom art thou speaking, dear?” demanded the wondering, but not the less awe-struck, Adelheid, believing that the weakened nerves of the poor girl were unstrung by the

horror of the spectacle—"it is a traveller like ourselves, that has unhappily perished in the very storm from which, by the kindness of Providence, we have been permitted to escape. Thou should'st not tremble thus, for, fearful as it is, he is in a condition to which we all must come."

"So soon ! so soon ! so suddenly—oh ! it is he !"

Adelheid, alarmed at the violence of Christine's feelings, was quite at a loss to account for them, when the relapsed grasp and the dying voice showed that her friend had fainted. Sigismund was one of the first to come to the assistance of his sister, who was soon restored to consciousness by the ordinary applications. In order to effect the cure, she was borne to a rock at some little distance from the rest of the party, where none of the other sex presumed to come, with the exception of her brother. The latter staid but a moment, for a stir in the little party at the bone-house induced him

to go thither. His return was slow, thoughtful, and sad.

“The feelings of our poor Christine have been unhinged, and she is too easily excited to undergo the vicissitudes of a journey,” observed Adelheid, after having announced the restoration of the sufferer to her senses; “have you seen her thus before?”

“No angel could be more tranquil and happy than my cruelly treated sister was until this last disgrace;—you appear ignorant yourself of the melancholy truth?”

Adelheid looked her surprise.

“The dead man is he who was so lately intended to be the master of my sister’s happiness, and the wounds on his body leave little doubt that he has been murdered.”

The emotion of Christine needed no further explanation.

“Murdered!” repeated Adelheid, in a whisper.

“Of that frightful truth there can be no question. Your father and our friends are

now employed in making the examinations which may hereafter be useful in discovering the authors of the deed."

"Sigismund!"

"What would'st thou, Adelheid?"

"Thou hast felt resentment against this unfortunate man?"

"I deny it not; could a brother feel otherwise?"

"But now—now that God hath so fearfully visited him?"

"From my soul I forgive him. Had we met in Italy, whither I knew he was going—but this is foolish."

"Worse than that, Sigismund."

"From my inmost soul I pardon him. I never thought him worthy of her whose simple affections were won by the first signs of his pretended interest; but I could not wish him so cruel and sudden an end. May God have mercy on him, as he is pardoned by me!"

Adelheid received the silent pressure of the

hand which followed with pious satisfaction. They then separated, he to join the group that was collected around the body, and she to take her station again near Christine. The former, however, was met by the Signor Grimaldi who urged his immediate departure with the females for the convent, promising that the rest of the travellers should follow as soon as the present melancholy duty was ended. As Sigismund had no wish to be a party in what was going on, and there was reason to think his sister would be spared much pain by quitting the spot, he gladly acquiesced in the proposal. Immediate steps were taken for its accomplishment.

Christine mounted her mule, in obedience to her brother's desire, quietly, and without remonstrance; but her death-like countenance and fixed eye betrayed the violence of the shock she had received. During the whole of the ride to the convent she spoke not, and, as those around her felt for, and understood,

her distress, the little cavalcade could not have been more melancholy and silent had it borne with it the body of the slain. In an hour they reached the long sought for and so anxiously desired place of rest.

While this disposition of the feebler portion of the party was making, a different scene had taken place near what have been already so well called the houses of the living and the dead. As there existed no human habitation within several leagues of the abode of the Augustines on either side of the mountain, and as the paths were much frequented in the summer, the monks exercised a species of civil jurisdiction in such cases as required a prompt exercise of justice, or a necessary respect for those forms that might be important in its administration hereafter before the more regular authorities. It was no sooner known, therefore, that there was reason to suspect an act of violence had been committed, than the good clavier set seriously about taking the necessary

steps to authenticate all those circumstances that could be accurately ascertained.

The identity of the body as that of Jacques Colis, a small but substantial proprietor of the country of Vaud, was quickly established. To this fact not only several of the travellers could testify, but he was also known to one of the muleteers of whom he had engaged a beast to be left at Aoste, and, it will also be remembered, he had been seen by Pierre at Martigny while making his arrangements to pass the mountain. Of the mule there were no other traces than a few natural signs around the building, but which might equally be attributed to the beasts that still awaited the leisure of the travellers. The manner in which the unhappy man had come by his death admitted of no dispute. There were several wounds in the body, and a knife, of the sort then much used by travellers of an ordinary class, was left sticking in his back in a position to render it impossible to attribute the end of the suf-

ferer to suicide. The clothes, too, exhibited proofs of a struggle, for they were torn and soiled, but nothing had been taken away. A little gold was found in the pockets, and though in no great plenty still enough to weaken the first impression that there had also been a robbery.

“This is wonderful!” observed the good clavier, as he noted the last circumstance: “the dross which leads so many souls to damnation has been neglected, while Christian blood has been shed! This seems an act of vengeance rather than of cupidity. Let us now examine if any proofs are to be found of the scene of this tragedy.”

The search was unsuccessful. The whole of the surrounding region being composed of ferruginous rocks and their *débris*, it would not, indeed, have been an easy matter to trace the march of an army by their footsteps. The stain of blood, however, was nowhere discoverable, except on the spot where the body

had been found. The house itself furnished no particular evidence of the bloody scene of which it had been a witness. The bones of those who had died long before were lying on the stones, it is true, broken and scattered; but, as the curious were wont to stop, and sometimes to enter among and handle these remains of mortality, there was nothing new or peculiar in their present condition.

The interior of the dead house was obscure, and suited, in this particular at least, to its solemn office. While making the latter part of their examination, the monk and the two nobles, who began to feel a lively interest in the late event, stood before the window, gazing in at the gloomy but instructive scene. One body was so placed as to receive a few of the direct rays of the morning light, and it was consequently much more conspicuous than the rest, though even this was a dark and withered mummy that presented scarcely a vestige of the being it had been. Like all the others whose

parts still clung together, it had been placed against the wall, in the attitude of one that is seated, with the head fallen forward. The latter circumstance had brought the blackened and shrivelled face into the line of light. It had the ghastly grin of death, the features being distorted by the process of evaporation, and was altogether a revolting but salutary monitor of the common lot.

“’Tis the body of the poor vine-dresser ;” remarked the monk, more accustomed to the spectacle than his companions, who had shrunk from the sight ; “ he unwisely slept on yonder naked rock, and it proved to him the sleep of death. There have been many masses for his soul, but what is left of his material remains still lie unclaimed. But—how is this ! Pierre, thou hast lately passed this place ; what was the number of the bodies, at thy last visit ?”

“ Three, reverend clavier ; and yet the ladies spoke of four. I looked for the fourth when

in the building, but there appeared none fresh except this of poor Jacques Colis."

"Come hither, and say if there do not appear to be two in the far corner—here, where the body of thy old comrade the guide was placed, from respect for his calling; surely, there at least is a change in its position!"

Pierre approached, and taking off his cap in reverence, he leaned forward in the building, so as to exclude the external light from his eyes.

"Father!" he said, drawing back in surprise, "there is truly another; though I overlooked it when we entered the place."

"This must be examined to! The crime may be greater than we had believed!"

The servants of the convent and Pierre, whose long services rendered him a familiar of the brotherhood, now re-entered the building, while those without impatiently awaited the result. A cry from the interior prepared the latter for some fresh subject of horror, when

Pierre and his companions quickly reappeared, dragging a living man into the open air. When the light permitted, those who knew him recognized the mild demeanour, the subdued look, and the uneasy, distrustful glance of Balthazar.

The first sensation of the spectators was that of open amazement; but dark suspicion followed. The baron, the two Genoese, and the monk, had all been witnesses of the scene in the great square of Vévey. The person of the headsmen had become so well known to them by the passage on the lake and the event just alluded to, that there was not a moment of doubt touching his identity, and, coupled with the circumstances of that morning, there remained little more than the clue was now found to the cause of the murder.

We shall not stop to relate the particulars of the examination. It was short, reserved, and had the character of an investigation instituted more for the sake of form, than from

any incertitude there could exist on the subject of the facts. When the necessary inquiries were ended, the two nobles mounted. Father Xavier led the way, and the whole party proceeded towards the summit of the pass, leading Balthazar a prisoner, and leaving the body of Jacques Colis to its final rest, in that place where so many human forms had evaporated into air before him, unless those who had felt an interest in him in life should see fit to claim his remains.

The ascent between the refuge and the summit of St. Bernard is much more severe than on any other part of the road. The end of the convent, overhanging the northern brow of the gorge, and looking like a mass of that ferruginous and melancholy rock which gave the whole region so wild and so unearthly an aspect, soon became visible, carved and moulded into the shape of a rude human habitation. The last pitch was so steep as to be formed into a sort of stair-way, up which the groaning

mules toiled with difficulty. This labour overcome, the party stood on the highest point of the pass. Another minute brought them to the door of the convent.

CHAPTER V.

————— Hadst thou not been by,
A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,
Noted, and sign'd to do a deed of shame,
This murder had not come into my mind.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE arrival of Sigismund's party at the hospice preceded that of the other travellers more than an hour. They were received with the hospitality with which all were then welcomed at this celebrated convent; the visits of the curious and the vulgar not having blunted the benevolence of the monks, who, mostly accustomed to entertain the low-born and ignorant, were always happy to relieve the monotony of their solitude by intercourse with

guests of a superior class. The good clavier had prepared the way for their reception; for even on the wild ridge of St. Bernard, we do not fare the worse for carrying with us a prestige of that rank and consideration that are enjoyed in the world below. Although a mild Christian-like good-will were manifested to all, the heiress of Willading, a name that was generally known and honoured between the Alps and the Jura, met with those proofs of *empressement* and deference which betray the secret thought, in despite of conventional forms, and which told her, plainer than the words of welcome, that the retired Augustines were not sorry to see so fair and so noble a specimen of their species within their dreary walls.

All this, however, was lost on Sigismund. He was too much occupied with the events of the morning to note other things; and, first committing Adelheid and his sister to the care of their women, he went into the open air in order to await the arrival of the rest.

As it has been mentioned, the existence of the venerable convent of St. Bernard dates from a very remote period of Christianity. It stands on the very brow of the precipice which forms the last steep ascent in mounting to the col. The building is a high, narrow, but vast, barrack-looking edifice, built of the ferruginous stone of the region, having its gable placed toward the Valais, and its front stretching in the direction of the gorge in which it stands. Immediately before its principal door, the rock rises in an ill-shapen hillock, across which runs the path to Italy. This is literally the highest point of the pass, as the building itself is the most elevated habitable abode in Europe. At this spot, the distance from rock to rock, spanning the gorge, may be a hundred yards, the wild and reddish piles rising on each side for more than a thousand feet. These are merely dwarfs, however, among their sister piles, several of which, in plain view of the convent, reach to the height of eternal snow.

This point in the road attained, the path began immediately to descend, and the drippings of a snow-bank before the convent-door, which had resisted the greatest heat of the past summer, ran partly into the valley of the Rhone, and partly into Piedmont, the waters, after a long and devious course through the plains of France and Italy, meeting again in the common basin of the Mediterranean. The path, on quitting the convent, runs between the base of the rocks on its right and a little limpid lake on its left, the latter occupying nearly the entire cavity of the valley of the gorge. It then disappears between natural palisades of rock, at the other extremity of the col. This is the point where the superfluous waters of the lake find their outlet, descending swiftly, in a brawling little brook, on the sunny side of the Alps. The frontier of Italy is met on the margin of the lake, a long musket-shot from the abode of the Augustines, and near the site of a temple that

the Romans had raised in honour of Jupiter, in his attribute of director of storms.

Such was the outline of the view which presented itself to Sigismund, when he left the building to while away the time that must necessarily elapse before the arrival of the rest of the party. The hour was still early, though the great altitude of the site of the convent had brought it beneath the influence of the sun's rays an hour before. He had learned from a servant of the Augustines, that a number of ordinary travellers, of whom in the fine season hundreds at a time frequently passed the night in their dormitories, were now breaking their fasts in the refectory of the peasants, and he was willing to avoid the questions that their curiosity might prompt when they came to hear what had occurred lower down on the mountain. One of the brotherhood was caressing four or five enormous mastiffs, that were leaping about and barking with deep throats in front of the convent, while old Uberto

moved among them with a gravity and respect that better suited his years. Perceiving his guest, the Augustine quitted the dogs, and, lifting his eastern-looking cap, he gave him the salutation of the morning. Sigismund met the frank smile of the canon, who like himself was young, with a fit return. The occasion was such as Sigismund desired, and a friendly discourse succeeded while they paced along the margin of the lake, holding the path that leads across the col.

“ You are young in your charitable office, brother,” remarked the soldier, when familiarity was a little established. “ This will be among the first of the winters you will have passed at your benevolent post ?”

“ It will make the eighth, as novice and as canon. We are early trained to this kind of life, though no practice will enable any of us to withstand the effect which the thin air and intense cold produce on the lungs many winters in succession. We go down to Mar-

tigny when there is occasion, and breathe an atmosphere better suited to man. Thou hadst an angry storm below, the past night?"

"So angry, that we thank God it is over, and that we are left to share your hospitality. Were there many on the mountain besides ourselves, or did any come up from Italy?"

"There were none but those who are now in the common refectory, and none came from Aoste. The season for the traveller is over. This is a month in which we see only those who are much pressed, and who have their reasons for trusting the weather. In the summer we sometimes lodge a thousand guests."

"They whom ye receive have reason to be thankful, reverend Augustine; for, in sooth, this does not seem a region that abounds in its fruits."

Sigismund and the monk looked around at the vast piles of ragged naked rocks, and they smiled as their eyes met.

"Nature gives literally nothing," answered

the Augustine: "even the fuel that warms us is transported leagues on the backs of mules, and thou wilt readily conceive that of all others this is a necessary we cannot forego. Happily, we have some of our ancient, and what were once rich, endowments; and——"

The young canon hesitated to proceed.

"You were about to say, father, that they who have the means to show gratitude are not always unmindful of the wants of those, who share the same hospitality without possessing the same ability to manifest their respect for the institution."

The Augustine bowed, and he turned the discourse by pointing out the frontiers of Italy, and the site of the ancient temple; both of which they had by this time reached. An animal moved among the rocks and attracted their attention.

"Can it be a chamois!" exclaimed Sigismund, whose blood began to quicken with a hunter's eagerness; "I would I had arms!"

“It is a dog, though not of our mountain breed! The mastiffs of the convent have failed in hospitality, and the poor beast has been driven to take refuge in this retired spot, in waiting for his master, who probably makes one of the party in the refectory. See, they come; their approaching footsteps have brought the cautious animal from his cover.”

Sigismund saw, in truth, that a party of three pedestrians was quitting the convent, taking the path for Italy. A sudden and painful suspicion flashed upon his mind. The dog was Nettuno, most probably driven by the mastiffs, as the monk had suggested, to seek a shelter in this retreat, and one of those who approached, by his gait and stature, was no other than his master.

“Thou knowest, father,” he said, with a clammy tongue, for he was strangely agitated between reluctance to accuse Maso of such a crime, and horror at the fate of Jacques Colis,

“that there has been a murder on the mountain?”

The monk quietly assented. One who lived on that road, and in that age, was not easily excited by an event of so frequent occurrence. Sigismund hastily recounted to his companion all the circumstances that were then known to himself, and related the manner in which he had first met the Italian on the lake, and his general impressions concerning his character.

“All come and go unquestioned here;” returned the Augustine, when the other had ended. “Our convent has been founded in charity, and we pray for the sinner without enquiring into the amount of his crime. Still we have authority, and it is especially our duty, to keep the road clear that our own purposes may not be defeated. I leave thee to do what thou judgest most prudent and proper in a matter so delicate.”

Sigismund was silent; but as the pedes-

trians were drawing near, his resolution was soon and sternly formed. The obligations that he owed to Maso made him more prompt, for it excited a jealous distrust of his own powers to discharge what he conceived to be a duty. Even those late events in which his sister was so wronged had their share, too, on the decision of a mind so resolute to be upright. Placing himself in the middle of the path, he awaited the arrival of the party, while the monk stood quietly at his side. When the travellers were within speaking distance, the young man first discovered that the companions of *Il Maledetto* were Pippo and Conrad. Their several rencontres had made him sufficiently acquainted with the persons of the two latter, to enable him to recognize them at a glance; and Sigismund began to think the undertaking in which he had embarked more grave than he had at first imagined. Should there be a disposition to resist he was but one against three.

“Buon giorno, Signor Capitano,” cried Maso, saluting with his cap, when sufficiently near to those who occupied the path; “we meet often, and in all weathers; by day and by night; on the land and on the water; in the valley and on the mountain; in the city, and on this naked rock, as Providence wills. As many chances try men’s characters, we shall come to know each other in time!”

“Thou hast well observed, Maso; though I fear thou art a man oftener met than easily understood.”

“Signore, I am amphibious, like Nettuno here, being part of the earth and part of the sea. As the learned say, I am not yet classed. We are repaid for an evil night by a fine day; and the descent into Italy will be pleasanter than we found the coming up. Shall I order honest Giacomo of Aosta to prepare the supper, and to air the beds for the noble company that is to follow? You will scarce do more than reach his hostelry before

the young and the beautiful will begin to think of their pillows."

"Maso, I had thought thee among our party, when I left the refuge this morning?"

"By San Thomaso! Signore, but I had the same opinion touching yourself!"

"Thou wert early a-foot it would seem, or thou could'st not have so much preceded me?"

"Look you, brave Signor Sigismondo, for brave I know you to be, and in the water a swimmer little less determined than gallant Nettuno there—I am a traveller, and have much need of my time, which is the larger portion of my property. We sea-animals are sometimes rich and sometimes poor, as the wind happens to blow, and of late I have been driven to struggle with foul gales and troubled waves. To such a man, an hour of industry in the morning often gives a heartier meal and sweeter rest at night. I left you all in the refuge sleeping soundly, even to the mules"—Maso laughed at his own fancies,

as he included the brutes in the party,—“and I reached the convent just as the first touch of the sun tipped yonder white peak with its purple light.”

“As thou left us so early, thou mayest not have heard, then, that the body of a murdered man was found in the bone-house—the building near that in which we slept—and that it is the body of one known?”

Sigismund spoke firmly and deliberately, as if he would come by degrees to his purpose, while, at the same time, he made the other sensible of his being in earnest. Maso started. He made a movement so unequivocally like one which would have manifested an intention to proceed, that the young man raised his hand to repulse him. But violence was unnecessary, for the mariner instantly became composed, and seemingly more disposed to listen.

“Where there has been a crime, Maso, there must have been a criminal!”

“The Bishop of Sion could not have made truth clearer to the sinner than yourself, Signor Sigismondo ! Your manner leads me to ask what I have to do with this ?”

“There has been a murder, Maso, and the murderer is sought. The dead was found near the spot where thou passed the night ; I shall not conceal the unhappy suspicions that are so natural.”

“Diamine ! where did you pass the night yourself, brave Capitano, if I may be so bold as to question my superior ? Where did the noble Baron de Willading take his rest, and his fair daughter, and one nobler and more illustrious than he, and Pierre the guide, and —ay, and our friends, the mules again ?”

Maso laughed recklessly once more, as he made this second allusion to the patient brutes. Sigismund disliked his levity, which he thought forced and unnatural.

“This reasoning may satisfy thee, unfortunate man, but it will not satisfy others.

Thou wert alone, but we travelled in company; judging from thy exterior, thou art but little favoured by fortune, whereas we are more happy in this particular; and thou hast been, and art still, in haste to depart, while the discovery of the foul deed is owing to us alone. Thou must return to the convent, that this grave matter may, at least, be examined."

Il Maledetto seemed troubled. Once or twice he glanced his eye at the quiet athletic frame of the young man, and then turned them on the path in reflection. Although Sigismund narrowly watched the workings of his countenance, giving a little of his attention also, from time to time, to the movements of Pippo and the pilgrim, he preserved himself a perfectly calm exterior. Firm in his purpose, accustomed to make extraordinary exertions in his manly exercises, and conscious of his great physical force, he was not a man to be easily daunted. It is true that the

companions of Maso conducted themselves in a way to excite no additional apprehensions on their account; for, on the announcement of the murder they moved away from his person a little, as by a natural horror of the hand that could have done the deed. They now consulted together, and, profiting by their situation behind the back of the Italian, they made signs to Sigismund of their readiness to assist should it be necessary. He received the signal with satisfaction; for, though he knew them to be knaves, he sufficiently understood the difference between audacious crime and mere roguery to believe they might, in this instance at least, prove true.

“Thou wilt return to the convent, Maso,” resumed the young soldier, who would gladly avoid a struggle with a man who had done him and those he loved so much service, though resolved to discharge what he conceived to be an imperious duty: “this pilgrim and his friend will be of our party in order that,

when we quit the mountain, all may leave it blameless and unsuspected."

"Signor Sigismondo, the proposal is fair ; it has a touch of reason, I allow ; but unluckily it does not suit my interests. I am engaged in a delicate mission, and too much time has been already lost by the way to waste more without good cause. I have great pity for poor Jacques Colis—"

"Ha ! thou knowest the sufferer's name then ; thy unlucky tongue hath betrayed thee, Maso !"

Il Maledetto was again troubled. His features betrayed it, for he frowned like a man who had committed a grave fault in a matter touching an important interest. His olive complexion changed, and his interrogator thought that his eye quailed before his own fixed look. But the emotion was transient, and shuddering, as if to shake off a weakness, his appearance became once more natural and composed.

"Thou makest no reply ?"

“Signore, you have my answer; affairs press, and my visit to the convent of San Bernardo has been made. I am bound to Aosta, and should be happy to do your bidding with the worthy Giacomo. I have but a step to make to find myself in the dominions of the house of Savoy, and with your leave, gallant Capitano, I will now take it.”

Maso moved a little aside with the intention to pass Sigismund, when Pippo and Conrad threw themselves on him from behind, pinning his arms to his sides by main force. The face of the Italian grew livid, and he smiled with the contempt and hatred of an inveterately angered man. Assembling all his force, he suddenly exerted it with the energy and courage of a lion, shouting—

“*Nettuno!*”

The struggle was short but fierce. When it terminated, Pippo lay bleeding among the rocks with a broken head, and the pilgrim was gasping near him under the tremendous

gripe of the animal. Maso himself stood firm, though pale and frowning like one who had collected all his energies, both physical and moral, to meet this emergency.

“Am I a brute, to be set upon by the scum of the earth?” he cried: “if thou wouldst aught with me, Signor Sigismondo, raise thine own arm, but strike not with the hands of these base reptiles; thou wilt find me a man, in strength and courage, at least not unworthy of thyself.”

“The attack on thy person, Maso, was not made by my order, nor by my desire;” returned Sigismund, reddening. “I believe myself sufficient to arrest thee, and, if not, here come assistants that thou wilt scarce deem it prudent to resist.”

The Augustine had stepped on a rock the moment the struggle commenced, whence he made a signal which brought all the mastiffs from the convent. These powerful animals now arrived in a group, apprised by their

instinct that strife was afoot. Nettuno immediately released the pilgrim and stood at bay ; too faithful to desert his master in his need, and yet too conscious of the force opposed to him to court a contest so unequal. Luckily for the noble dog, the friendship of old Uberto proved his protection. When the younger animals saw their patriarch disposed to amity they forbore their attack, waiting at least for another signal to be given. In the mean while, Maso had time to look about him, and to form his decision less under the influence of surprise and feeling than had been previously the case.

“ Signore,” he answered, “ since it is your pleasure, I will return among the Augustines. But I ask, as simple justice, that, if I am to be hunted by dogs as a beast of prey, all who were in the same circumstances as myself may become subject to the same rule. This pilgrim and the Neapolitan came up the mountain yesterday, as well as myself, and I

demand their arrest until they too, can give an account of themselves. It will not be the first time that we have been inhabitants of the same prison."

Conrad crossed himself in submission, neither he nor Pippo raising any objection to the step. On the contrary, each frankly admitted it was no more than equitable on its face.

"We are poor travellers on whom many accidents have already alighted, and we may well be pressed to reach the end of our journey," said the pilgrim; "but that justice may be done we shall submit without a murmur. I am loaded with the sins of many besides my own, however, and St. Peter he knows that the last are not light. This holy canon will see that masses are said in the convent chapel in behalf of those for whom I travel; this duly done, I am an infant in your hands."

The good Augustine professed the perfect readiness of the fraternity to pray for all who were in necessity, with the single proviso that

they should be Christians. With this amicable understanding then, the peace was made between them, and the parties immediately took the path that led back to the convent. On reaching the building Maso, with the two travellers who had been found in his company, were placed in safe keeping in one of the rooms of the solid edifice, until the return of the clavier should enable them to vindicate their innocence.

Satisfied with himself for the part he had acted in the late affair, Sigismund strolled into the chapel, where, at that early hour, some of the brotherhood were always occupied in saying masses in behalf of the souls of the living or of the dead. He was here when he received a note from the Signor Grimaldi, apprising him of the arrest of his father, and of the dark suspicions that were so naturally connected with the transaction. It is unnecessary to dwell on the nature of the shock he received from this intelligence. After a

few moments of bitter anguish, he perceived the urgency of making his sister acquainted with the truth as speedily as possible. The arrival of the party from the refuge was expected every moment, and by delay he increased the risk of Christine's hearing the appalling fact from some other quarter. He sought an audience, therefore, with Adelheid, the instant he had summoned sufficient self-command to undertake the duty.

Mademoiselle de Willading was struck with the pale brow and agitated air of the young soldier at the first glance of her eye.

"Thou hast permitted this unexpected blow to affect thee unusually, Sigismund," she said, smiling, and offering her hand, for she felt that the circumstances were those in which cold and heartless forms should give place to feeling and sincerity. "Thy sister is tranquil if not happy."

"She does not know the worst—she has yet to learn the most cruel part of the truth.

Adelheid; they have found one concealed among the dead of the bone-house, and are now leading him here as the murderer of poor Jacques Colis !”

“ Another !” said Adelheid, turning pale in alarm ; “ we appear to be surrounded by assassins !”

“ No, it cannot be true ! I know my poor father’s mildness of disposition too well ; his habitual tenderness to all around him ; his horror at the sight of blood, even for his odious task !”

“ Sigismund, thy father !”

The young man groaned. Concealing his face with his hands he sank into a seat. The fearful truth, with all its causes and consequences, began to dawn upon Adelheid. Sinking upon a chair herself, she sat long looking at the convulsed and working frame of Sigismund in silent horror. It appeared to her, that Providence, for some great but secret purpose, was disposed to visit them all with more than

a double amount of its anger, and that a family which had been accursed for so many generations, was about to fill the measure of its woes. Still her own true heart did not change. On the contrary, its long-cherished and secret purpose rather grew stronger under this sudden appeal to its generous and noble properties, and never was the resolution to devote herself, her life, and all her envied hopes, to the solace of his unmerited wrongs, so strong and riveted as at that trying moment.

In a little time Sigismund regained enough self-command to be able to commence the narrative of what had passed. They then concerted together the best means to make Christine acquainted with that which it was absolutely necessary she should now know.

“Tell her the simple truth,” added Sigismund; “it cannot long be concealed, and it were better that she knew it; but tell her, also, my firm dependence on our father’s innocence. God, for one of those inscrutable pur-

poses which set human intelligence at defiance, has made him a common executioner, but the curse has not extended to his nature. Trust me, dearest Adelheid, a more gentle dove-like nature does not exist in man than that of the poor Balthazar—the despised and persecuted Balthazar. I have heard my mother dwell upon the nights of anguish and suffering that have preceded the day on which the duties of his office were to be discharged, and often have I heard that admirable woman, whose spirit is far more equal to support our unmerited fortunes, declare she has often prayed that he and all that are her's might die, so that they died innocently, rather than one of a temper so gentle and harmless should again be brought to endure the agony she had witnessed !”

“It is unhappy that he should be here at so luckless a moment ! What unhappy motive can have led thy father to this spot, at a time so extraordinary ?”

“Christine will tell thee that she expected to see him at the convent. We are a race proscribed, Mademoiselle de Willading, but we are human.”

“Dearest Sigismund—”

“I feel my injustice, and can only pray to be forgiven. But there are moments of feeling so intense, that I am ready to believe and treat all of my species as common enemies. Christine is an only daughter, and thou thyself, beloved Adelheid, kind, dutiful, and good as I know thee to be, art not more dear to the Baron de Willading than my poor sister is among us. Her parents have yielded her to thy generous kindness, for they believe it for her good; but their hearts have been wrung by the separation. Thou didst not know it, but Christine took her last embrace of her mother here on the mountain, at Liddes, and it was then agreed that her father should watch her in safety over the col, and bestow the final blessing at Aoste. Mademoiselle de Wil-

lading, you move in pride, surrounded by many protectors, who are honoured in doing you service ; but the abased and the hunted must indulge even their best affections stealthily, and without obtrusion ! The love and tenderness of Balthazar would pass for mockery with the vulgar ! Such is man in his habits and opinions, when wrong usurps the place of right."

Adelheid saw that the moment was not favourable for urging consolation, and she abstained from a reply. She rejoiced, however, to hear the presence of the headsman so satisfactorily accounted for, though she could not quiet herself from an apprehension that the universal weakness of human nature, which so suddenly permits the perversion of the best of our passions to the worst, and the dreadful probability that Balthazar, suffering intensely by this compelled separation from his daughter, on accidentally encountering the man who was its cause, might have listened to some violent impulse of resentment and revenge. She

saw also that Sigismund, in despite of his general confidence in the principles of his father, had fearful glimmerings of some such event, and that he fearfully anticipated the worst, even while he most professed confidence in the innocence of the accused. The interview was soon ended, and they separated; each endeavouring to invent plausible reasons for what had happened.

The arrival of the party from the refuge took place soon afterwards. It was followed by the necessary explanations, and a more detailed narrative of all that had passed. A consultation was held between the chiefs of the brotherhood and the two old nobles, and the course it was most expedient to pursue was calmly and prudently discussed.

The result was not known for some hours later. It was then generally proclaimed in the convent that a grave and legal investigation of all the facts was to take place with the least possible delay.

The Col of St. Bernard, as has been stated

already, lies within the limits of the present canton, but what was then the allied state of the Valais. The crime had consequently been committed within the jurisdiction of that country, but as the Valais was thus leagued with Switzerland, there existed such an intimate understanding between the two, that it was rare any grave proceedings were had against a citizen of either in the dominion of the other, without paying great deference to the feelings and the rights of the country of the accused. Messengers were therefore despatched to Vévey, to inform the authorities of that place of a transaction which involved the safety of an officer of the great canton, (for such was Balthazar,) and which had cost a citizen of Vaud his life. On the other hand, a similar communication was sent to Sion, the two places being about equidistant from the convent, with such pressing invitations to the authorities to be prompt, as were deemed necessary to bring on an immediate investigation. Melchior de Willading in a letter to his friend the bailiff,

set forth the inconvenience of his return with Adelheid at that late season, and the importance of the functionary's testimony, with such other statements as were likely to effect his wishes, while the superior of the brotherhood charged himself with making representations, with a similar intent, to the heads of his own republic. Justice in that age was not administered as frankly and openly as in this later period, its agents in the old world exercising even now a discretion that we are not accustomed to see confided to them. Her proceedings were enveloped in darkness, the blind deity being far more known in her decrees than in her principles, and mystery was then deemed an important auxiliary of power.

With this brief explanation we shall shift the time to the third day from that on which the travellers reached the convent, referring the reader to the succeeding chapter for an account of what it brought forth.

CHAPTER VI.

Anon a figure enters, quaintly neat,
All pride and business, bustle and conceit;
With looks unaltered by these scenes of woe,
With speed that, ent'ring, speaks his haste to go.
He bids the gazing throng around him fly,
And carries fate and physic in his eye.

CRABBE.

THERE is another receptacle for those who die on the Great St. Bernard, hard by the convent itself. At the close of the time mentioned in the last chapter, and near the approach of night, Sigismund was pacing the rocks on which this little chapel stands, buried in reflections to which his own history and the recent events had given birth. The snow

that fell during the late storm had entirely disappeared, and the frozen element was now visible only on those airy pinnacles that form the higher peaks of the Alps. Twilight had already settled into the lower valleys, but the whole of the superior region was glowing with the fairy-like lustre of the last rays of the sun. The air was chill, for at that hour and season, whatever might be the state of the weather, the evening invariably brought with it a positive sensation of cold in the gorge of St. Bernard, where frosts prevailed at night, even in midsummer. Still the wind, though strong, was balmy and soft, blowing athwart the heated plains of Lombardy, and reaching the mountains charged with the moisture of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. As the young man turned in his walk, and faced this breeze, it came over his spirit with a feeling of hope and home. The greater part of his life had been past in the sunny country whence it blew, and there were moments when he was

lulled into forgetfulness, by the grateful recollections imparted by its fragrance. But when compelled to turn northward again, and his eye fell on the misty hoary piles that distinguished his native land, rude and ragged faces of rock, frozen glaciers, and deep ravine-like valleys and glens, seemed to him to be types of his own stormy, unprofitable, and fruitless life, and to foretell a career which, though it might have touches of grandeur, was doomed to be barren of all that is genial and consolatory.

All in and about the convent was still. The mountain had an imposing air of deep solitude amid the wildest natural magnificence. Few travellers had passed since the storm, and, luckily for those who, under the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed so much desired privacy, all of these had diligently gone their several ways. None were left, therefore, on the col, but those who had an interest in the serious investigations which were about to

take place. An officer of justice from Sion, wearing the livery of the Valais, appeared at a window, a sign that the regular authorities of the country had taken cognizance of the murder, but disappearing, the young man, to all external appearance, was left in the solitary possession of the pass. Even the dogs had been kenneled, and the pious monks were healthfully occupied in the religious offices of the vespers.

Sigismund turned his eye upward at the apartment in which Adelheid and his sister dwelt, but as the solemn moment in which so much was to be decided drew nearer, they also had withdrawn into themselves, ceasing to hold communion, even by means of the eyes, with aught that might divert their holy and pure thoughts from ceaseless and intense devotional reflections. Until now he had been occasionally favoured with an answering and kind look from one or the other of these single-hearted and affectionate girls, both of whom he

so warmly loved, though with sentiments so different. It seemed that they too had at last left him to his isolated and hopeless existence. Sensible that this passing thought was weak and unmanly, the young man renewed his walk, and, instead of turning as before, he moved slowly on, stopping only when he had reached the opening of the little chapel of the dead.

Unlike the building lower down the path, the bone-house at the convent is divided into two apartments; the exterior, and one that may be called the interior, though both are open to the weather. The former contained piles of disjointed human bones, bleached by the storms that beat in at the windows, while the latter is consecrated to the covering of those that still preserve, in their outward appearance at least, some of the more familiar traces of humanity. The first had its usual compliment of dissevered and confounded fragments, in which the remains of young and old, of the two sexes, the fierce and the meek, the

penitent and the sinner, lay in indiscriminate confusion—an eloquent reproach to the pride of man; while the walls of the last supported some twenty blackened and shrivelled effigies of the race, to show to what a pass of disgusting and frightful deformity the human form can be reduced, when deprived of that noble principle which likens it to its Divine Creator. On a table, in the centre of a group of black and grinning companions in misfortune, sat all that was left of Jacques Colis, who had been removed from the bone-house below to this at the convent for purposes connected with the coming investigation. The body was accidentally placed in such an attitude that the face was brought within the line of the parting light, while it had no other covering than the clothes worn by the murdered man in life. Sigismund gazed long at the pallid lineaments. They were still distorted with the agony produced by separating the soul from the body. All feeling of resentment for his sister's wrongs was lost in

pity for the fate that had so suddenly overtaken one, in whom the passions, the interests, and the complicated machinery of this state of being, were so actively at work. Then came the bitter apprehension that his own father, in a moment of ungovernable anger, excited by the accumulated wrongs that bore so hard on him and his, might really have been the instrument of effecting the fearful and sudden change. Sickening with the thought, the young man turned and walked away towards the brow of the declivity. Voices, ascending to his ear, recalled him to the actual situation of things.

A train of mules were climbing the last acclivity where the path takes the broken precipitous appearance of a flight of steps. The light was still sufficient to distinguish the forms and general appearance of the travellers. Sigismund immediately recognized them to be the bailiff of Vévey and his attendants, for whose arrival the formal proceedings of the examination had alone been stayed.

“A fair evening, Herr Sigismund, and a happy meeting,” cried Peterchen, so soon as his weary mule, which frequently halted under its unwieldy burthen, had brought him within hearing. “Little did I think to see thee again so quickly, and less still to lay eyes on this holy convent; for though the traveller might have returned in thy person, nothing short of a miracle—” Here the bailiff winked, for he was one of those Protestants whose faith was most manifested in these side-hits at the opinions and practices of Rome,—“Nothing but a miracle, I say, and that too a miracle of some saint whose bones have been drying these ten thousand years, until every morsel of our weak flesh has fairly disappeared, could bring down old St. Bernard’s abode upon the shores of the Lemman. I have known many who have left Vaud to cross the Alps come back and winter in Vévey; but never did I know the stone that was placed upon another, in a workman-like manner, quit its bed without help from the

hand of man. They say stones are particularly hard-hearted, and yet your saint and miracle-monger hath a way to move them!"

Peterchen chuckled at his own pleasantry, as men in authority are apt to enjoy that which comes exclusively of their own cleverness, and he winked round among his followers, as if he would invite them to bear witness to the rap he had given the Papists, even on their own exclusive ground. When the platform of the col was attained, he checked the mule and continued his address, for want of wind had nipped his wit, as it might be, in the bud.

"A bad business this, Herr Sigismund; a thoroughly bad affair. It has drawn me far from home, at a ticklish season, and it has unexpectedly stopped the Herr von Willading (he spoke in German) in his journey over the mountains, and that, too, at a moment when all had need be diligent among the Alps.

How does the keen air of the col agree with the fair Adelheid?"

"God be thanked, Herr Bailiff, in bodily health that excellent young lady was never better."

"God be thanked, right truly! She is a tender flower, and one that might be suddenly cut off by the frosts of St. Bernard. And the noble Genoese, who travels with so much modest simplicity, in a way to reprove the vain and idle—I hope he does not miss the sun among our rocks?"

"He is an Italian, and must think of us and our climate according to his habits; though in the way of health he seems at his ease."

"Well, this is consolatory! Herr Sigismund, 'were the truth known," rejoined Peterchen, bending as far forward on his mule as a certain protuberance of his body would permit, and then suddenly drawing himself up again in reserve—"but a state secret is a state secret,

and least of all should it escape one who is truly and legitimately a child of the state. My love and friendship for Melchior von Willading are great, and of right excellent quality; but I should not have visited this pass were it not to do honour to our guest the Genoese. I would not that the noble stranger went down from our hills with an unsavoury opinion of our hospitality. Hath the honourable Châtelain from Sion reached the hill?"

"He has been among us since the turn of the day, mein Herr, and is now in conference with those you have just named, on matters connected with the object of your common visit."

"He is an honest magistrate! and like ourselves, Master Sigismund, he comes of the pure German root, which is a foundation to support merit, though it might better be said by another. Had he a comfortable ride?"

"I have heard no complaint of his ascent."

"'Tis well. When the magistrate goes forth

to do justice, he hath a right to look for a fair time. All are then comfortable;—the noble Genoese, the honourable Melchior, and the worthy Châtelain.—And Jacques Colis?”

“ You know his unhappy fate, Herr Bailiff,” returned Sigismund briefly; for he was a little vexed with the other’s phlegm in a matter that so nearly touched his own feelings.

“ If I did not know it, Herr Steinbach, dost think I should now be here, instead of preparing for a warm bed near the great square of Vévey? Poor Jacques Colis! Well, he did the ceremonies of the abbaye an ill turn in refusing to buckle with the headsman’s daughter, but I do not know that he at all deserved the fate with which he has met.”

“ God forbid that any who were hurt, and that perhaps not without reason, by his want of faith, should think his weakness merited a punishment so heavy !”

“ Thou speakest like a sensible youth, a very sensible youth—ay, and like a Christian,

Herr Sigismund," answered Peterchen, "and I approve of thy words. To refuse to wive a maiden and to be murdered are very different offences, and should not be confounded. Do'st think these Augustines keep kirschwasser among their stores? It is strong work to climb up to their abode, and strong toil needs strong drink. Well, should they not be so provided, we must make the best of their other liquors. Herr Sigismund, do me the favour to lend me thy arm."

The bailiff now alighted with stiffened limbs, and, taking the arm of the other, he moved slowly towards the building.

"It is damnable to bear malice, and doubly damnable to bear malice against the dead! Therefore I beg you to take notice that I have quite forgotten the recent conduct of the deceased in the matter of our public games, as it becomes an impartial and upright judge to do. Poor Jacques Colis! Ah, death is awful at any time, but it is tenfold terrible to die in this sudden manner, post-haste as it were,

and that, too, on a path where we put one foot before the other with so much bodily pain. This is the ninth visit I have made the Augustines, and I cannot flatter the holy monks on the subject of their roads, much as I wish them well.—Is the reverend clavier back at his post again?”

“He is, and has been active in taking the usual examinations.”

“Activity is his strong property, and he needs be that, Herr Steinbach, who passeth the life of a mountaineer.—The noble Genoese, and my ancient friend Melchior, and his fair daughter the beautiful Adelheid, and the equitable Châtelain, thou sayest are all fairly reposed and comfortable?”

“Herr Bailiff, they have reason to thank God that the late storm and their mental troubles have done them no harm.”

“So—I would these Augustines kept kirsch-wasser among their liquors!”

Peterchen entered the convent, where his presence alone was wanting to proceed to bu-

siness. The mules were housed, the guides received as usual in the building, and then the preparations for the long-delayed examinations were seriously commenced.

It has already been mentioned that the fraternity of St. Bernard was of very ancient origin. It was founded in the year 962, by Bernard de Menthon, an Augustine canon of Aoste in Piedmont, for the double purposes of bodily succour and spiritual consolation. The idea of establishing a religious community in the midst of savage rocks, and at the highest point trod by the foot of man, was worthy of christian self-denial and a benevolent philanthropy. The experiment appears to have succeeded in a degree that is commensurate with its noble intention; for centuries have gone by, civilization has undergone a thousand changes, empires have been formed and upturned, thrones destroyed, and one half the world has been rescued from barbarism, while this piously-founded edifice still remains

in its simple and respectable usefulness where it was first erected, the refuge of the traveller and a shelter for the poor.

The convent buildings are necessarily vast, but, as all its other materials had to be transported to the place it occupies on the backs of mules, they are constructed chiefly of the ferruginous, hoarylooking stones that were quarried from the native rock. The cells of the monks, the long corridors, refectories for the different classes of travellers, and suited to the numbers of the guests, as well as those for the canons and their servants, and lodging rooms of different degrees of magnitude and convenience, with a chapel of some antiquity and of proper size, composed then, as now, the internal arrangements. There is no luxury, some comfort in behalf of those in whom indulgence has become a habit, and much of the frugal hospitality that is addressed to the personal wants and the decencies of life. Beyond this, the building, the entertainment, and the brotherhood, are marked by a

severe monastic self-denial, which appears to have received a character of barren and stern simplicity from the unvarying nakedness of all that meets the eye in that region of frost and sterility.

We shall not stop to say much of the little courtesies and the ceremonious asseverations of mutual goodwill and respect that passed between the Bailiff of Vévey and the Prior of St. Bernard, on the occasion of their present meeting. Peterchen was known to the brotherhood, and, though a Protestant, and one too that did not forbear to deliver his jest or his witticism against Rome and its flock at will, he was sufficiently well esteemed. In all the quêtes, or collections of the convent, the well-meaning Bernois had really shown himself a man of bowels, and one that was disposed to favour humanity, even while it helped the cause of his arch-enemy the Pope. The clavier was always well received, not only in his bailiwick but in his château, and in

spite of numberless little skirmishes on doctrine and practice, they always met with a welcome and generally parted in peace. This feeling of amity and good-will extended to the superior and to all the others of the holy community, for in addition to a certain heartiness of character in the bailiff there was mutual interest to maintain it. At the period of which we write, the vast possessions with which the monks of St. Bernard had formerly been endowed were already much reduced by sequestrations in different countries, that of Savoy in particular, and they were reduced then, as now, to seek supplies to meet the constant demands of travellers in the liberality of the well-disposed and charitable, and the liberality of Peterchen was thought to be cheaply purchased by his jokes, while, on the other hand, he had so many occasions, either in his own person or those of his friends, to visit the convent, that he always forbore to push contention to a quarrel.

“Welcome again, Herr Bailiff, and for the ninth time welcome!” continued the Prior, as he took the hand of Peterchen, leading the way to his own private parlour; “thou art always a welcome guest on the mountain, for we know that we entertain at least a friend.”

“And a heretic,” added Peterchen, laughing with all his might, though he uttered a joke which he now repeated for the ninth time. “We have met often, Herr Prior, and I hope we shall meet finally, after all our clambering of mountains, as well as our clambering after worldly benefits, is ended, and that where honest men come together, in spite of Pope or Luther, books, sermons, aves, or devils! This thought cheers me whenever I offer thee my hand,” shaking that of the other with a hearty good-will; “for I should not like to think, Father Michael, that, when we set out on the last long journey, we are to travel for ever in different ways. Thou may’st tarry awhile, if thou see’st fit, in thy purga-

tory, which is a lodging of thine own invention, and should therefore suit thee, but I trust to continue on, until fairly housed in heaven, miserable and unhappy sinner that I am !”

Peterchen spoke in the confident voice of one accustomed to utter his sentiments to inferiors, who either dared not, or did not deem it wise, to dispute his oracles ; and he ended with another deep-mouthed laugh, that filled the vaulted apartment of the smiling prior to the ceiling. Father Michael took all in good part, answering, as was his wont, in mildness and good-tempered charity ; for he was a priest of much learning, deep reflection, and rebuked opinions. The community over which he presided was so far worldly in its object as to keep the canons in constant communion with men, and he would not now have met for the first time one of those self-satisfied, authoritative, boisterous, well-meaning beings, of whose class Peterchen formed so conspicuous a member,

had this been the first of the bailiff's visits to the col. As it was, however, the Prior not only understood the species, but he well knew the individual specimen, and he was well enough disposed to humour the noisy pleasure of his companion. Disburthened of his superfluous clothing, delivered of his introductory jokes, and having achieved his salutations to the several canons, with suitable words of recognition to the three or four novices who were usually found on the mountain, Peterchen declared his readiness to enter on the duty of what the French call restoration. This want had been foreseen, and the Prior led the way to a private refectory, where preparations had been made for a sufficient supper, the bailiff being very generally known to be a huge feeder.

“Thou wilt not fare as well as in thy warm and cheerful town of Vévey, which outdoes most of Italy in its pleasantness and fruits; but thou shalt, at least, drink of thine own

warm wines," observed the superior, as they went along the corridor; "and a right goodly company awaits thee, to share not only thy repast but thy good companionship."

"Hast ever a drop of kirschwasser, brother Michael, in thy convent?"

"We have not only that, but we have the Baron de Willading, and a noble Genoese who is in his company; they are ready to set to, the moment they can see thy face."

"A noble Genoese!"

"An Italian gentleman, of a certainty; I think they call him a Genoese."

Peterchen stopped, laid a finger on his nose, and looked mysterious; but he forbore to speak, for, by the open simple countenance of the monk, he saw that the other had no suspicion of his meaning.

"I will hazard my office of bailiff against that of thy worthy clavier, that he is just what he seemeth,—that is to say, a Genoese!"

"The risk will not be great, for so he has

already announced himself. We ask no questions here, and be he who or what he may, he is welcome to come, and welcome to depart in peace."

"Ay, this is well enough for an Augustine on the top of the Alps,—he hath attendants?"

"A menial and a friend; the latter, however, left the convent for Italy, when the noble Genoese determined to remain until this inquiry was over. There was something said of heavy affairs which required that some explanations of the delay should be sent to others."

Peterchen again looked steadily at the Prior, smiling, as in pity, of his ignorance.

"Look thou, good Prior, much as I love thee and thy convent, and Melchior von Willading and his daughter, I would have spared myself this journey, but for that same Genoese. Let there be no questions, however, between us: the proper time to speak will come, and God forbid that I should be precipitate! Thou

shalt then see in what manner a bailiff of the great canton can acquit himself! At present we will trust to thy prudence. The friend hath gone to Italy in haste, that the delay may not create surprise! Well, each one to his humour on the highway: it is mine to journey in honour and security, though others may have a different taste. Let there be little said, good Michael: not so much as an imprudent look of the eye;—and now, o' Heaven's sake, thy glass of kirschwasser!"

They were at the door of the refectory and the conversation ceased. On entering, Peterchen found his friend the baron, the Signor Grimaldi, and the châtelain of Sion, a grave ponderous dignitary of justice, of German extraction like himself and the Prior, but whose race, from a long residence on the confines of Italy, had imbibed some peculiarities of the southern character. Sigismund and all the rest of the travellers were precluded from joining the repast, to which it was the intention of

the prudent canons to give a semi-official character.

The meeting between Peterchen and those who had so lately quitted Vévey was not distinguished by any extraordinary movements of courtesy; but that between the bailiff and the châtelain, who represented the authorities of friendly and adjoining states, was marked by a profusion of politic and diplomatic civilities. Various personal and public inquiries were exchanged, each appearing to strive to outdo the other in manifesting interest in the smallest details on those points in which it was proper for a stranger to feel an interest. Though the distance between the two capitals was fully fifteen leagues, every foot of the ground was travelled over by one or the other of the parties, either in commendation of its beauties, or in questions that touched its interests.

“ We come equally of Teutonic fathers, Herr Châtelain,” concluded the bailiff, as the whole party placed themselves at table, after

the reverences and homages were thoroughly exhausted, "though Providence has cast our fortunes in different countries. I swear to thee, that the sound of thy German is music to my ears! Thou hast wonderfully escaped corruptions, though compelled to consort so much with the bastards of Romans, Celts, and Burgundians, of whom thou hast so many in this portion of thy states. It is curious to observe,"—for Peterchen had a little of an antiquarian flavour among the other crude elements of his character—"that whenever a much-trodden path traverses a country, its people catch the blood as well as the opinions of those who travel it, after the manner that tares are scattered and sown by the passing winds. Here has the St. Bernard been a thoroughfare since the time of the Romans, and thou wilt find as many races among those who dwell on the way-side as there are villages between the convent and Vévey. It is not so with you of the Upper Valais, Herr

Châtelain; there the pure race exists as it came from the other side of the Rhine, and honoured and preserved may it continue for another thousand years !”

There are few people so debased in their own opinion as not to be proud of their peculiar origin and character. The habit of always viewing ourselves, our motives, and even our conduct, on the favourable side, is the parent of self-esteem ; and this weakness, carried into communities, commonly gets to be the cause of a somewhat fallacious gauge of merit among the population of entire countries. The châtelain, Melchior de Willading, and the Prior, all of whom came from the same Teutonic root, received the remark complacently ; for each felt it an honour to be descended from such ancestors ; while the more polished and artificial Italian succeeded in concealing the smile that, on such an occasion, would be apt to play about the mouth of a man whose parentage ran, through a long line

of sophisticated and politic nobles, into the consuls and patricians of Rome, and most probably, through these again into the wily and ingenious Greek, a root distinguished for civilization when these patriarchs of the north lay buried in the depths of barbarism.

This little display of national vanity ended, the discourse took a more general turn. Nothing occurred during the entertainment, however, to denote that any of the company bethought him of the business on which they had met. But, just as twilight failed, and the repast was ended, the Prior invited his guests to lend their attention to the matter in hand, recalling them from their friendly attacks, their time-worn jokes, and their attenuated logic, in all of which Peterchen, Melchior, and the châtelain had indulged with some freedom, to a question involving the life or death of at least one of their fellow-creatures.

The subordinates of the convent were occupied during the supper with the arrange-

ments that had been previously commanded ; and when Father Michael arose and intimated to his companions that their presence was now expected elsewhere, he led them to a place that had been completely prepared for their reception.

CHAPTER VII.

Was ever tale
With such a gallant modesty rehearsed?

HOME.

PURPOSES of convenience, as well as others that were naturally connected with the religious opinions, not to say the superstitions, of most of the prisoners, had induced the monks to select the chapel of the convent for the judgment-hall. This consecrated part of the edifice was of sufficient size to contain all who were accustomed to assemble within its walls. It was decorated in the manner that is usual to churches of the Romish persuasion, having its master-altar,—and two of smaller

size that were dedicated to esteemed saints. A large lamp illuminated the place, though the great altar lay in doubtful light, leaving play for the imagination to people and adorn that part of the chapel. Within the railing of the choir there stood a table: it held some object that was concealed from view by a sweeping pall. Immediately beneath the lamp was placed another which served the purposes of the clavier, who acted as a clerk on this occasion. They who were to fill the offices of judges took their stations near. A knot of females were clustered within the shadows of one of the side-altars, hovering around each other in the way that their sensitive sex is known to interpose between the exhibition of its peculiar weaknesses and the rude observations of the world. Stifled sobs and convulsive movements occasionally escaped this little group of acutely feeling and warm-hearted beings, betraying the strength of the emotions they would fain conceal. The canons and novices were

ranged on one side, the guides and muleteers formed a back-ground to the whole, while the fine form of Sigismund stood, stern and motionless as a statue, on the steps of the altar which was opposite to the females. He watched the minutest proceeding of the investigation with a steadiness that was the result of severe practice in self-command, and a jealous determination to suffer no new wrong to be accumulated on the head of his father.

When the little confusion produced by the entrance of the party from the refectory had subsided, the Prior made a signal to one of the officers of justice. The man disappeared, and shortly returned with one of the prisoners, the investigation being intended to embrace the cases of all who had been detained by the prudence of the monks. Balthazar (for it was he) approached the table in his usual meek manner. His limbs were unbound, and his exterior calm, though the quick unquiet movements of his eye, and the workings of his pale features,

whenever a suppressed sob from among the females reached his ear, betrayed the inward struggle he had to maintain, in order to preserve appearances. When he was confronted with his examiners, Father Michael bowed to the châtelain; for, though the others were admitted by courtesy to participate in the investigations, the legal right to proceed in an affair of this nature, within the limits of the Valais, belonged to this functionary alone.

“Thou art called Balthazar?” abruptly commenced the judge, glancing at his notes.

The answer was a simple inclination of the body.

“And thou art the headsman of the canton of Berne?”

A similar silent reply was given.

“The office is hereditary in thy family; it has been so for ages?”

Balthazar erected his frame, breathing heavily, like one oppressed at the heart, but who would bear down his feelings before he answered.

“Herr Châtelain,” he said with energy, “by the judgment of God it has been so.”

“Honest Balthazar, thou throwest too much emphasis into thy words,” interposed the bailiff. “All that belongs to authority is honourable, and is not to be treated as an evil. Hereditary claims, when venerable by time and use, have a double estimation with the world, since it brings the merit of the ancestor to sustain that of the descendant. We have our rights of the *bürgerschaft*, and thou thy rights of execution. The time has been when thy fathers were well content with their privilege.”

Balthazar bowed in submission ; but he seemed to think any other reply unnecessary. The fingers of Sigismund writhed on the hilt of his sword, and a groan, which the young man well knew had been wrested from the bosom of his mother, came from the women.

“The remark of the worthy and honourable bailiff is just,” resumed the Valaisan ; “all that is of the state is for the good of the state,

and all that is for the comfort and security of man is honourable. Be not ashamed, therefore, of thy office, Balthazar, which, being necessary, is not to be idly condemned; but answer faithfully and with truth to the questions I am about to put.—Thou hast a daughter?”

“In that much, at least, have I been blessed!”

The energy with which he spoke caused a sudden movement in the judges. They looked at each other in surprise, for it was apparent they did not expect these touches of human feeling in a man who lived, as it were, in constant warfare with his fellow-creatures.

“Thou hast reason,” returned the châtelain, recovering his gravity; “for she is said to be both dutiful and comely. Thou wert about to marry this daughter?”

Balthazar acknowledged the truth of this by another inclination.

“Didst thou ever know a Vévaisan of the name of Jacques Colis?”

“Mein Herr, I did. He was to have become my son.”

The châtelain was again surprised, for the steadiness of the reply denoted innocence, and he studied the countenance of the prisoner intently. He found apparent frankness where he had expected to meet with subterfuge, and, like all who have great acquaintance with crime, his distrust increased. The simplicity of one who really had nothing to conceal, unlike that appearance of firmness, which is assumed to affect innocence, set his shrewdness at fault, though familiar with most of the expedients of the guilty.

“This Jacques Colis was to have wived thy daughter?” continued the châtelain, growing more wary as he thought he detected greater evidence of art in the accused.

“It was so understood between us.”

“Did he love thy child?”

The muscles of Balthazar’s mouth played convulsively, the twitchings of the lip seeming to threaten a loss of self-command.

“Mein Herr, I believed it.”

“Yet he refused to fulfil the engagement?”

“He did.”

Even Marguerithe was alarmed at the deep emphasis with which this answer was given, and, for the first time in her life, she trembled lest the accumulating load of obloquy had indeed been too strong for her husband's principles.

“Thou felt anger at his conduct, and at the public manner in which he disgraced thee and thine?”

“Herr Châtelain, I am human. When Jacques Colis repudiated my daughter, he bruised a tender plant in the girl, and he caused bitterness in a father's heart.”

“Thou hast received instruction superior to thy condition, Balthazar!”

“We are a race of executioners, but we are not the unnurtured herd that people fancy. 'Tis the will of Berne that made me what I am, and no desire nor wants of my own.”

“The charge is honourable, as are all that come of the state,” repeated the other, with the formal readiness in which set phrases are uttered; “the charge is honourable for one of thy birth. God assigns to each his station on earth, and he has fixed thy duties. When Jacques Colis refused thy daughter he left his country to escape thy revenge?”

“Were Jacques Colis living he would not utter so foul a lie!”

“I knew his honest and upright nature!” exclaimed Marguerithe with energy! “God pardon me that I ever doubted it!”

The judges turned inquisitive glances towards the indistinct cluster of females, but the examination did not the less proceed.

“Thou knowest, then, that Jacques Colis is dead?”

“How can I doubt it, mein Herr, when I saw his bleeding body?”

“Balthazar, thou seemest disposed to aid the examination, though with what views is

better known to Him who sees the inmost heart than to me. I will come at once, therefore, to the more essential facts. Thou art a native and a resident of Berne; the headsman of the canton—a creditable office in itself, though the ignorance and prejudices of man are not apt so to consider it. Thou wouldst have married thy daughter with a substantial peasant of Vaud. The intended bridegroom repudiated thy child, in face of the thousands who came to Vévey to witness the festivities of the Ab-baye; he departed on a journey to avoid thee, or his own feelings, or rumour, or what thou wilt; he met his death by murder on this mountain; his body was discovered with the knife in the recent wound, and thou, who shouldst have been on thy path homeward, wert found passing the night near the murdered man. Thine own reason will show thee the connection which we are led to form between these several events, and thou art now required to explain that which to us seems so

suspicious, but which to thyself may be clear. Speak freely, but speak truth, as thou reverest God, and in thine own interest."

Balthazar hesitated and appeared to collect his thoughts. His head was lowered in a thoughtful attitude, and then, looking his examiner steadily in the face, he replied. His manner was calm, and the tone in which he spoke, if not that of one innocent in fact, was that of one who well knew how to assume the exterior of that character.

"Herr Châtelain," he said, "I have foreseen the suspicions that would be apt to fasten on me in these unhappy circumstances, but, used to trust in Providence, I shall speak the truth without fear. Of the intention of Jacques Colis to depart I knew nothing. He went his way privately, and if you will do me the justice to reflect a little, it will be seen that I was the last man to whom he would have been likely to let his intention be known. I came up the St. Bernard, drawn by a chain that your own

heart will own is difficult to break if you are a father. My daughter was on the road to Italy with kind and true friends, who were not ashamed to feel for a headsman's child, and who took her in order to heal the wound that had been so unfeelingly inflicted."

"This is true!" exclaimed the Baron de Willading; "Balthazar surely says nought but truth here!"

"This is known and allowed; crime is not always the result of cool determination, but it comes of terror, of sudden thought, the angry mood, the dire temptation, and a fair occasion. Though thou left'st Vévey ignorant of Jacques Colis' departure, didst thou hear nothing of his movements by the way?"

Balthazar changed colour. There was evidently a struggle in his bosom, as if he shrunk from making an acknowledgment that might militate against his interests; but, glancing an eye at the guides, he recovered his proper tone of mind, and answered firmly:—

"I did. Pierre Dumont had heard the tale of my child's disgrace, and, ignorant that I was the injured parent, he told me of the manner in which the unhappy man had retreated from the mockery of his companions. I knew, therefore, that we were on the same path."

"And yet thou perseveredst?"

"In what, Herr Châtelain? Was I to desert my daughter because one who had already proved false to her stood in my way?"

"Thou hast well answered, Balthazar," interrupted Marguerithe. "Thou hast answered as became thee! We are few, and we are all to each other. Thou wert not to forget our child because it pleased others to despise her."

The Signor Grimaldi bent towards the Valaisan, and whispered near his ear.

"This hath the air of nature," he observed; "and does it not account for the appearance of the father on the road taken by the murdered man?"

"We do not question the probability or

justness of such a motive, Signore; but revenge may have suddenly mounted to the height of ferocity in some wrangle: one accustomed to blood yields easily to his passions and his habits."

The truth of these suggestions was plausible, and the noble Genoese drew back in cold disappointment. The châtelain consulted with those about him, and then desired the wife to come forth in order to be confronted with her husband. Marguerite obeyed. Her movement was slow, and her whole manner that of one who yielded to a stern necessity.

"Thou art the headsman's wife?"

"And a headsman's daughter."

"Marguerite is a well-disposed and a sensible woman," put in Peterchen; "she understands that an office under the state can never bring disgrace in the eyes of reason, and wishes no part of her history or origin to be concealed."

The glance that flashed from the eye of Bal-

thazar's wife was withering ; but the dogmatic bailiff was by far too well satisfied with his own wisdom to be conscious of its effects.

“ And a headsman's daughter,” continued the examining judge ; “ why art thou here ? ”

“ Because I am a wife and a mother. As the latter I came upon the mountain, and as a wife I have mounted to the convent to be present at this examination. They will have it that there is blood upon the hands of Balthazar, and I am here to repel the lie.”

“ And yet thou hast not been slow to confess thy connexion with a race of executioners !— They who are accustomed to see their fellows die might have less warmth in meeting a plain inquiry of justice ! ”

“ Herr Châtelain, thy meaning is understood. We have been weighed upon heavily by Providence, but, until now, they whom we have been made to serve have had the policy to treat us with fair words ! Thou hast spoken of blood ; that which has been shed by Bal-

thazar, by his, and by mine, lies on the consciences of those who commanded it to be spilt. The unwilling instruments of thy justice are innocent before God."

"This is strange language for people of thy employment! Dost thou, too, Balthazar, speak and think with thy consort in this matter?"

"Nature has given us men sterner feelings, mein Herr. I was born to the office I hold, taught to believe it right, if not honourable, and I have struggled hard to do its duties without murmuring. The case is different with poor Marguerithe. She is a mother, and lives in her children; she has seen one that is near her heart publicly scorned, and she feels like a mother."

"And thou, who art a father, what has been thy manner of thinking under this insult?"

Balthazar was meek by nature, and, as he had just said, he had been trained to the exercise of his functions; but he was capable of

profound affections. The question touched him in a sensitive spot, and he writhed under his feelings; but, accustomed to command himself before the public eye, and alive to the pride of manhood, his mighty effort to suppress the agony that loaded his heart was rewarded with success.

“Sorrow for my unoffending child; sorrow for him who had forgotten his faith; and sorrow for them who have been at the root of this bitter wrong,” was the answer.

“This man has been accustomed to hear forgiveness preached to the criminal, and he turns his schooling to good account,” whispered the wary judge to those near him. “We must try his guilt by other means. He may be readier in reply than steady in his nerves.”

Signing to the assistants, the Valaisan now quietly awaited the effect of a new experiment. The pall was removed, and the body of Jacques Colis exposed. He was seated as in life, on the table in front of the grand altar.

“The innocent have no dread of those whose spirits have deserted the flesh,” continued the châtelain, “but God often sorely pricks the consciences of the guilty, when they are made to see the works of their own cruel hands. Approach, and look upon the dead, Balthazar; thou and thy wife, that we may judge of the manner in which ye face the murdered and wronged man.”

A more fruitless experiment could not well have been attempted with one of the headsmen's office; for long familiarity with such sights had taken off that edge of horror which the less accustomed would be apt to feel. Whether it were owing to this circumstance, or to his innocence, Balthazar walked to the side of the body unshaken, and stood long regarding the bloodless features with unmoved tranquillity. His habits were quiet and meek, and little given to display. The feelings which crowded his mind, therefore, did not escape him in words, though a gleam of something

like regret crossed his face. Not so with his companion. Marguerite took the hand of the dead man, and hot tears began to follow each other down her cheeks, as she gazed at his shrunken and altered lineaments.

“ Poor Jacques Colis !” she said in a manner to be heard by all present ; “ thou had’st thy faults, like all born of woman ; but thou did’st not merit this ! Little did the mother that bore thee, and who lived in thy infant smile—she who fondled thee on her knee, and cherished thee in her bosom, foresee thy fearful and sudden end ! It was happy for her that she never knew the fruit of all her love, and pains, and care, else bitterly would she have mourned over what was then her joy, and in sorrow would she have witnessed thy pleasantest smile. We live in a fearful world, Balthazar ; a world in which the wicked triumph ! Thy hand, that would not willingly harm the meanest creature which has been fashioned by the will of God, is made to take life, and thy heart

—thy excellent heart—is slowly hardening in the execution of this accursed office ! The judgment-seat hath fallen to the lot of the corrupt and designing ; mercy hath become the laughing-stock of the ruthless, and death is inflicted by the hand of him who would live in peace with his kind. This cometh of thwarting God's intentions with the selfishness and designs of men ! We would be wiser than he who made the universe, and we betray the weakness of fools ! Go to—go to, ye proud and great of the earth—if we have taken life, it hath been at your bidding ; but we have nought of this on our consciences. The deed hath been the work of the rapacious and violent — it is no deed of revenge.”

“ In what manner are we to know that what thou sayest is true ?” asked the châtelain, who had advanced near the altar, in order to watch the effects of the trial to which he had put Balthazar and his wife.

“ I am not surprised at thy question, Herr

Châtelain, for nothing comes quicker to the minds of the honoured and happy than the thought of resenting an evil turn. It is not so with the despised. Revenge would be an idle remedy for us. Would it raise us in men's esteem? should we forget our own degraded condition? should we be a whit nearer respect after the deed was done than we were before?"

"This may be true, but the angered do not reason. Thou art not suspected, Marguerite, except as having heard the truth from thy husband since the deed has been committed, but thine own discernment will show that nought is more probable than that a hot contention about the past may have led Balthazar, who is accustomed to see blood, into the commission of this act?"

"Here is thy boasted justice! Thine own laws are brought in support of thine own oppression. Did'st thou know how much pains his father had in teaching Balthazar to strike, how many long and anxious visits were paid between

his parent and mine in order to bring up the youth in the way of his dreadful calling, thou would'st not think him so apt ! God unfitted him for his office, as he has unfitted many of higher and different pretensions for duties that have been cast upon them in virtue of their birthrights. Had it been I, châtelain, thy suspicions would have a better show of reason. I am formed with strong and quick feelings, and reason has often proved too weak for passion, though the rebuke that has been daily received throughout a life hath long since tamed all of pride that ever dwelt in me."

"Thou hast a daughter present?"

Marguerite pointed to the group which held her child.

"The trial is severe," said the judge, who began to feel compunctions that were rare to one of his habits, "but it is as necessary to your own future peace, as it is to justice itself, that the truth should be known. I am compelled to order thy daughter to advance to the body."

Marguerite received this unexpected command with cold womanly reserve. Too much wounded to complain, but trembling for the conduct of her child, she went to the cluster of females, pressed Christine to her heart, and led her silently forward. She presented her to the châtelain, with a dignity so calm and quiet that the latter found it oppressive!

"This is Balthazar's child," she said. Then folding her arms, she retired herself a step, an attentive observer of what passed.

The judge regarded the sweet pallid face of the trembling girl with an interest he had seldom felt for any who had come before him in the discharge of his unbending duties. He spoke to her kindly, and even encouragingly, placing himself intentionally between her and the dead, momentarily hiding the appalling spectacle from her view, that she might have time to summon her courage. Marguerite blessed him in her heart for this small grace, and was better satisfied.

“Thou wert betrothed to Jacques Colis?” demanded the châtelain, using a gentleness of voice that was singularly in contrast with his former stern interrogatories.

The utmost that Christine could reply was to bow her head.

“Thy nuptials were to take place at the late meeting of the Abbaye des Vignerons—it is our unpleasant duty to wound where we could wish to heal—but thy betrothed refused to redeem his pledge?”

“The heart is weak, and sometimes shrinks from its own good purposes,” murmured Christine. “He was but human, and he could not withstand the sneers of all about him.”

The châtelain was so entranced by her gentle and sweet manner that he leaned forward to listen, lest a syllable of what she whispered might escape his ears.

“Thou acquittest, then, Jacques Colis of any false intention?”

“He was less strong than he believed himself, mein Herr; he was not equal to sharing

our disgrace, which was put rudely and too strongly before him."

"Thou hadst consented freely to the marriage thyself, and wert well disposed to become his wife?"

The imploring look and heaving respiration of Christine were lost on the blunted sensibilities of a criminal judge.

"Was the youth dear to thee?" he repeated, without perceiving the wound he was inflicting on female reserve.

Christine shuddered. She was not accustomed to have affections which she considered the most sacred of her short and innocent existence so rudely probed; but, believing that the safety of her father depended on her frankness and sincerity, by an effort that was nearly superhuman, she was enabled to reply. The bright glow that suffused her face, however, proclaimed the power of that sentiment which becomes instinctive to her sex, arraying her features in the lustre of maiden shame.

"I was little used to hear words of praise,

Herr Châtelain,—and they are so soothing to the ears of the despised! I felt as a girl acknowledges the preference of a youth who is not disagreeable to her. I thought he loved me—and—what would you more, mein Herr?”

“None could hate thee, innocent and abused child!” murmured the Signor Grimaldi.

“You forget that I am Balthazar’s daughter, mein Herr; none of our race are viewed with favour.”

“Thou, at least, must be an exception!”

“Leaving this aside,” continued the châtelain, “I would know if thy parents showed resentment at the misconduct of thy betrothed; whether aught was said in thy presence, that can throw light on this unhappy affair?”

The officer of the Valais turned his head aside, for he met the surprised and displeased glance of the Genoese, whose eye expressed a gentleman’s opinion at hearing a child thus questioned in a matter that so nearly touched her father’s life. But the look and the im-

proper character of the examination escaped the notice of Christine. She relied with filial confidence on the innocence of the author of her being, and, so far from being shocked, she rejoiced with the simplicity and confidence of the undesigning at being permitted to say anything that might vindicate him in the eyes of his judges.

“Herr Châtelain,” she answered eagerly, the blood that had mounted to her cheeks from female weakness, deepening to, and warming, her very temples with a holier sentiment : “Herr Châtelain, we wept together when alone ; we prayed for our enemies as for ourselves, but nought was said to the prejudice of poor Jacques—no, not a whisper.”

“Wept and prayed !” repeated the judge, looking from the child to the father, in the manner of a man that fancied he did not hear aright.

“I said both, mein Herr ; if the former was a weakness, the latter was a duty.”

"This is strange language in the mouth of a headsman's child!"

Christine appeared at a loss, for a moment, to comprehend his meaning; but, passing a hand across her fair brow, she continued.

"I think I understand what you would say, mein Herr," she said; "the world believes us to be without feeling and without hope. We are what we seem in the eyes of others because the law makes it so, but we are in our hearts like all around us, Herr Châtelain—with this difference, that, feeling our abasement among men, we lean more closely and more affectionately on God. You may condemn us to do your offices and to bear your dislike, but you cannot rob us of our trust in the justice of heaven. In that, at least, we are the equals of the proudest baron in the cantons!"

"The examination had better rest here," said the prior, advancing with glistening eyes to interpose between the maiden and her

interrogator. "Thou knowest, Herr Bourrit, that we have other prisoners."

The châtelain, who felt his own practised obduracy of feeling strangely giving way before the innocent and guileless faith of Christine, was not unwilling himself to change the direction of the inquiries. The family of Balthazar was directed to retire, and the attendants were commanded to bring forward Pippo and Conrad.

CHAPTER VIII.

And when thou thus
Shalt stand impleaded at the high tribunal
Of hoodwink'd Justice, who shall tell thy audit ?

COTTON.

THE buffoon and the pilgrim, though of a general appearance likely to excite distrust, presented themselves with the confidence and composure of innocence. Their examination was short, for the account they gave of their movements was clear and connected. Circumstances that were known to the monks, too, greatly aided in producing a conviction that they could have had no agency in the murder. They had left the valley below some hours before the arrival of Jacques Colis, and they

reached the convent, weary and foot-sore, as was usual with all who ascended that long and toilsome path, shortly after the commencement of the storm. Measures had been taken by the local authorities, during the time lost in waiting the arrival of the bailiff and the châtelain, to ascertain all the minute facts which it was supposed would be useful in ferreting out the truth, and the results of these enquiries had also been favourable to these itinerants, whose habits of vagabondism might otherwise very justly have brought them within the pale of suspicion.

The flippant Pippo was the principal speaker in the short investigation, and his answers were given with a ready frankness that, under the circumstances, did him and his companion infinite service. The buffoon, though accustomed to deception and frauds, had sufficient mother-wit to comprehend the critical position in which he was now placed, and that it was wiser to be sincere, than to attempt effecting

his ends by any of the usual means of prevarication. He answered the judge, therefore, with a simplicity which his ordinary pursuits would not have given reason to expect, and apparently with some touches of feeling that did credit to his heart.

“This frankness is thy friend,” added the châtelain, after he had nearly exhausted his questions, the answers having convinced him that there was no ground of suspicion, beyond the adventitious circumstance of their having been travellers on the same road as the deceased; “it has done much towards convincing me of thy innocence, and it is in general the best shield for those who have committed no crime. I only marvel that one of thy habits should have had the sense to discover it!”

“Suffer me to tell you, Signor Castellano, or Podestà, whichever may be your eccellenza’s proper title, that you have not given Pippo credit for the wit he really hath. It is true I live by throwing dust into men’s eyes, and

by making others think the wrong is the right ; but mother Nature has given us all an insight into our own interests, and mine is quite clear enough to let me know when the true is better than the false."

" Happy would it be if all had the same faculty and the same disposition to put it in use."

" I shall not presume to teach one as wise and as experienced as yourself, eccellenza, but if an humble man might speak freely in this honourable presence, he would say that it is not common to meet with a fact without finding it a very near neighbour to a lie. They pass for the wisest and the most virtuous who best know how to mix the two so artfully together, that, like the sweets we put upon healing bitters, the palatable may make the useful go down. Such at least is the opinion of a poor street buffoon, who has no better claim to merit than having learned his art on the Mole and in the Toledo of Bellissima Napoli,

which, as everybody knows, is a bit of heaven fallen upon earth !”

The fervour with which Pippo uttered the customary eulogium on the site of the ancient Parthenope was so natural and characteristic as to excite a smile in the judge, in spite of the solemn duty in which he was engaged, and it was believed to be an additional proof of the speaker's innocence. The châtelain then slowly recapitulated the history of the buffoon and the pilgrim to his companions, the purport of which was as follows.

Pippo naïvely admitted the debauch at Vévey, implicating the festivities of the day and the known frailty of the flesh as the two influencing causes. Conrad, however, stood upon the purity of his life and the sacred character of his calling, justifying the company he kept on the respectable plea of necessity, and on that of the mortifications to which a pilgrimage should, of right, subject him who undertakes it. They had quitted Vaud to-

gether as early as the evening of the day of the abbaye's ceremonies, and, from that time to the moment of their arrival at the convent, had made a diligent use of their legs, in order to cross the col before the snows should set in and render the passage dangerous. They had been seen at Martigny, at Liddes, and at St. Pierre, alone and at proper hours, making the best of their way towards the hospice; and, though of necessity their progress and actions, for several hours after quitting the latter place, were not brought within the observation of any but of that all-seeing eye which commands a view of the recesses of the Alps equally with those of more frequented spots, their arrival at the abode of the monks was sufficiently seasonable to give reason to believe that no portion of the intervening time had been wasted by the way. Thus far, their account of themselves and their movements was distinct, while, on the other hand, there was not a single fact to

implicate either, beyond the suspicion that was more or less common to all who happened to be on the mountain at the moment the crime was committed.

“ The innocence of these two men would seem so clear, and their readiness to appear and answer to our questions is so much in their favour,” observed the experienced châtelain, “ that I do not deem it just to detain them longer. The pilgrim, in particular, has a heavy trust ; I understand he performs his penance as much for others as for himself, and it is scarce decent in us, who are believers and servants of the church, to place obstacles in his path. I will suggest the expediency, therefore, of giving him at least permission to depart.”

“ As we are near the end of the enquiries,” interrupted the Signor Grimaldi, gravely, “ I would suggest, with due deference to a better opinion and more experience, the propriety

that all should remain, ourselves included, until we have come to a better understanding of the truth."

Both Pippo and the pilgrim met this suggestion with ready declarations of their willingness to continue at the convent until the following morning. This little concession, however, had no great merit, for the lateness of the hour rendered it imprudent to depart immediately, and the affair was finally settled by ordering them to retire, it being understood that, unless previously called for, they might depart with the reappearance of the dawn. Maso was the next and the last to be examined.

Il Maledetto presented himself with perfect steadiness of nerve. He was accompanied by Nettuno, the mastiffs of the convent having been kennelled for the night. It had been the habit of the dog of late to stray among the rocks by day, and to return to the convent in the

evening in quest of food, the sterile St. Bernard possessing nothing whatever for the support of man or beast except that which came from the liberality of the monks, every animal but the chamois and the lämmergeyer refusing to ascend so near the region of eternal snows. In his master, however, Nettuno found a steady friend, never failing to receive all that was necessary to his wants from the portion of Maso himself; for the faithful beast was admitted at his periodical visits to the temporary prison in which the latter was confined.

The châtelain waited a moment for the little stir occasioned by the entrance of the prisoner to subside, when he pursued the enquiry.

“Thou art a Genoese of the name of Thomaso Santi?” he asked, consulting his notes.

“By this name, Signore, am I generally known.”

“Thou art a mariner, and it is said one of courage and skill. Why hast thou given thyself the ungracious appellation of *Il Maledetto*?”

“Men call me thus. It is a misfortune but not a crime to be accursed.”

“He that is so ready to abuse his own fortunes should not be surprised if others are led to think he merits his fate. We have some accounts of thee in Valais; 'tis said thou art a free-trader?”

“The fact can little concern Valais or her government, since all come and go unquestioned in this free land.”

“It is true we do not imitate our neighbours in all their policy; neither do we like to see so often those who set at naught the laws of friendly states. Why art thou journeying on this road?”

“Signore, if I am what you say, the reason of my being here is sufficiently plain. It is probably because the Lombard and the Piedmontese are more exacting of the stranger than you of the mountains.”

“Your effects have been examined, and they offer nothing to support the suspicion.

By all appearances, Maso, thou hast not much of the goods of life to boast of ; but, in spite of this, thy reputation clings to thee."

" Ay, Signore, this is much after the world's humour. Let it fancy any quality in a man, and he is sure to get more than his share of the same, whether it be for or against his interest. The rich man's florin is quickly coined into a sequin by vulgar tongues, while the poor man is lucky if he can get the change of a silver mark for an ounce of the better metal. Even poor Nettuno finds it difficult to get a living here at the convent, because some difference in coat and instinct has given him a bad name among the dogs of St. Bernard !"

" Thy answer agrees with thy character ; thou art said to have more wit than honesty, Maso, and thou art described as one that can form a desperate resolution and act up to its decision at need ?"

" I am as Heaven willed at the birth, Signor

Castellano, and as the chances of a pretty busy life have served to give the work its finish. That I am not wanting in manly qualities on occasion, perhaps these noble travellers will be willing to testify, in consideration of some activity that I may have shown on the Leman, during their late passage of that treacherous water."

Though this was said carelessly, the appeal to the recollection and gratitude of those he had served was too direct to be overlooked. Melchior de Willading, the pious clavier, and the Signor Grimaldi, all testified in behalf of the prisoner, freely admitting that, without his coolness and skill, the Winkelried and all she held would irretrievably have been lost. Sigismund was not content with so cold a demonstration of his feelings. He owed not only the lives of his father and himself to the courage of Maso, but that of one dearer than all ; one whose preservation; to his youthful imagination, seemed a service that might

nearly atone for any crime, and his gratitude was in proportion.

“ I will testify more strongly to thy merit, Maso, in face of this or any tribunal ;” he said, grasping the hand of the Italian. One who showed so much bravery and so strong love for his fellows would be little likely to take life clandestinely and like a coward. Thou mayest count on my testimony in this strait—if thou art guilty of this crime who can hope to be innocent !”

Maso returned the friendly grasp till their fingers seemed to grow into each other. His eye, too, showed he was not without wholesome native sympathies, though education and his habits might have warped them from their true direction. A tear, in spite of his effort to suppress the weakness, started from its fountain, rolling down his sunburnt cheek like a solitary rivulet trickling through a barren and rugged waste.

“ This is frank, and as becomes a soldier,

Signore," he said, "and I receive it as it is given, in kindness and love. But we will not lay more stress upon the affair of the lake than it deserves. This keen-sighted chate-lain need not be told that I could not be of use in saving your lives, without saving my own; and, unless I much mistake the meaning of his eye, he is about to say that we are fashioned like this wild country in which chance has brought us together, with our spots of generous fertility mingled with much unfruitful rock, and that he who does a good act to-day may forget himself by doing an evil turn to-morrow."

"Thou givest reason to all who hear thee to mourn that thy career has not been more profitable to thyself and the public," answered the judge; "one who can reason so well, and who hath this clear insight into his own disposition, must err less from ignorance than wantonness!"

"There you do me injustice, Signor Cas-

tellano, and the laws more credit than they deserve. I shall not deny that justice—or what is called justice—and I have some acquaintance. I have been the tenant of many prisons before this which has been furnished by the holy canons, and I have seen every stage of the rogue's progress, from him who is still startled by his first crime, dreaming heavy dreams, and fancying each stone of his cell has an eye to reproach him, to him who no sooner does a wrong than it is forgotten in the wish to find the means of committing another; and I call Heaven as a witness, that more is done to help along the scholar in his study of vice, by those who are styled the ministers of justice, than by his own natural frailties, the wants of his habits, or the strength of his passions. Let the judge feel a father's mildness, the laws possess that pure justice which is of things that are not perverted, and society become what it claims to be, a community of mutual support, and, my

life on it, châtelain, thy functions will be lessened of most of their weight and of all their oppression."

"This language is both bold and without an object. Explain the manner of thy quitting Vévey, Maso, the road thou hast travelled, the hours of thy passages by the different villages, and the reason why thou wert discovered near the Refuge, alone, and why thou quittedst the companions with whom thou hadst passed the night so early and so clandestinely?"

The Italian listened attentively to these several interrogatories; when they were all put he gravely and calmly set about furnishing his answers. The history of his departure from Vévey, his appearance at St. Maurice, Martigny, Liddes, and St. Pierre, was distinctly given, and it was in perfect accordance with the private information that had been gleaned by the authorities. He had passed the last habitation on the mountain, on

foot and alone, about an hour before the solitary horseman, who was now known to be Jacques Colis, was seen to proceed in the same direction, and he admitted that he was overtaken by the latter, just as he reached the upper extremity of the plain beneath Vélain, where they were seen in company, though at a considerable distance and by a doubtful light, by the travellers who were conducted by Pierre.

Thus far the account given of himself by Maso was in perfect conformity with what was already known to the châtelain; but, after turning the rock already mentioned in a previous chapter, all was buried in mystery, with the exception of the incidents that have been regularly related in the narrative. The Italian, in his further explanations, added that he soon parted with his companion, who, impatient of delay, and desirous of reaching the convent before night, had urged his beast to greater speed, while he himself had turned a little

aside from the path to rest himself, and to make a few preparations that he had deemed necessary before going directly to the convent.

The whole of this short history was delivered with a composure as great as that which had just been displayed by Pippo and the pilgrim ; and it was impossible for any present to detect the slightest improbability or contradiction in the tale. The meeting with the other travellers in the storm Maso ascribed to the fact of their having passed him while he was stationary, and to his greater speed when in motion ; two circumstances that were quite as likely to be true as all the rest of the account. He had left the Refuge at the first glimpse of dawn, because he was behind his time, and it had been his intention to descend to Aoste that night, an exertion that was necessary in order to repair the loss.

“ This may be true,” resumed the judge ;
“ but how dost thou account for thy poverty ?
In searching thy effects, thou art found to be

in a condition little better than that of a mendicant. Even thy purse is empty, though known to be a successful and desperate trifier with the revenue in all those states where the entrance duty is enforced?"

"He that plays deepest, Signore, is most likely to be stripped of his means. What is there new or unlooked-for in the fact that a dealer in the contraband should lose his venture?"

"This is more plausible than convincing. Thou art signalled as being accustomed to transport articles of the jewellers from Geneva into the adjoining states, and thou art known to come from the head-quarters of these artisans. Thy losses must have been unusual to have left thee so naked. I much fear that a bootless speculation in thy usual trade has driven thee to repair the loss by the murder of this unhappy man, who left his home well supplied with gold, and, as it would seem, with a valuable store of jewellery, too. The particulars are

especially mentioned in this written account of his effects, which the honourable bailiff bringeth from his friends."

Maso mused silently, and in deep abstraction. He then desired that the chapel might be cleared of all but the travellers of condition, the monks, and his judges. The request was granted, for it was expected that he was about to make an important confession, as indeed, in a certain degree, proved to be the fact.

"Should I clear myself of the charge of poverty, Signor Castellano," he demanded, when all the inferiors had left the place, "shall I stand acquitted in your eyes of the charge of murder?"

"Surely not: still thou wilt have removed one of the principal grounds of temptation, and in that thou wilt be greatly the gainer, for we know that Jacques Colis hath been robbed as well as slain."

Maso appeared to deliberate again, as a man is apt to pause before he takes a step that may

materially affect his interests. But suddenly deciding, like a man of prompt opinions, he called to Nettuno, and seating himself on the steps of one of the side-altars, he proceeded to make his revelation with great method and coolness. Removing some of the long shaggy hair of the dog, Il Maledetto showed the attentive and curious spectators that a belt of leather had been ingeniously placed about the body of the animal, next its skin. It was so concealed as to be quite hid from the view of those who did not make particular search, a process that Nettuno, judging by the scowling looks he threw at most present, and the manner in which he showed his teeth, would not be likely to permit to a stranger. The belt was opened, and Maso laid a glittering necklace of precious stones, in which rubies and emeralds vied with other gems of price, with some of a dealer's coquetry, under the strong light of the lamp.

"There you see the fruits of a life of hazards and hardships, Signor Châtelain," he

said; if my purse is empty, it is because the Jewish Calvinists of Geneva have taken the last liard in payment of the jewels."

"This is an ornament of rare beauty and exceeding value, to be seen in the possession of one of thy appearance and habits, Maso!" exclaimed the frugal Valaisan.

"Signore, its cost was a hundred doppie of pure gold and full weight, and it is contracted for with a young noble of Milano, who hopes to win his mistress by the present, for a profit of fifty. Affairs were getting low with me in consequence of sundry seizures and a total wreck, and I took the adventure with the hope of sudden and great gain. As there is nothing against the laws of Valais in the matter, I trust to stand acquitted, châtelain, for my frankness. One who was master of this would be little likely to shed blood for the trifle that would be found on the person of Jacques Colis."

"Thou hast more," observed the judge, sign-

ing with his hand as he spoke ; “ let us see all thou hast.”

“ Not a brooch, or so much as a worthless garnet.”

“ Nay, I see the belt which contains them among the hairs of the dog.”

Maso either felt or feigned a well-acted surprise. Nettuno had been placed in a convenient attitude for his master to unloosen the belt, and, as it was the intention of the latter to replace it, the animal still lay quietly in the same position, a circumstance which displaced his shaggy coat, and allowed the châtelain to detect the object to which he had just alluded.

“ Signore,” said the smuggler, changing colour, but endeavouring to speak lightly of a discovery which all the others present evidently considered to be grave, “ it would seem that the dog, accustomed to do these little offices in behalf of his master, has been tempted by success to undertake a speculation on his

own account. By my patron saint and the Virgin ! I know nothing of this second adventure."

"Trifle not, but undo the belt, lest I have the beast muzzled that it may be performed by others," sternly commanded the châtelain.

The Italian complied, though with an ill grace that was much too apparent for his own interest. Having loosened the fastenings, he reluctantly gave the envelope to the Valaisan. The latter cut the cloth, and laid some ten or fifteen different pieces of jewellery on the table. The spectators crowded about the spot in curiosity, while the judge eagerly referred to the written description of the effects of the murdered man.

"A ring of brilliants, with an emerald of price, the setting chased and heavy," read the Valaisan.

"Thank God, it is not here !" exclaimed the Signor Grimaldi. "One could wish to find so true a mariner innocent of this bloody deed !"

The châtelain believed he was on the scent of a secret that had begun to perplex him, and as few are so inherently humane as to prefer the advantage of another to their own success, he heard both the announcement and the declaration of the noble Genoese with a frown.

“A cross of turquoise of the length of two inches, with pearls of no great value intermixed,” continued the judge.

Sigismund groaned and turned away from the table.

“Unhappily, here is that which too well answers to the description!” slowly and with evident reluctance, escaped from the Signor Grimaldi.

“Let it be measured,” demanded the prisoner.

The experiment was made, and the agreement was found to be perfect.

“Bracelets of rubies, the stones set in foil, and six in number,” continued the methodical

châtelain, whose eye now lighted with the triumph of victory.

"These are wanting!" cried Melchior de Willading, who, in common with all whom he had served, took a lively interest in the fate of Maso. "There are no jewels of the description here!"

"Come to the next, Herr Châtelain," put in Peterchen, leaning to the side of the law's triumph; "let us have the next, o' God's name!"

"A brooch of amethyst, the stone of our own mountains, set in foil, and of the size of one eighth of an inch; form oval."

It was lying on the table, beyond all possibility of dispute. All the remaining articles, which were chiefly rings of the less prized stones, such as jasper, granite, topaz, and turquoise, were also identified, answering perfectly to the description furnished by the jeweller who had sold them to Jacques Colis the night of the fête, when, with Swiss thrift, he had laid

in this small stock in trade, with a view to diminish the cost of his intended journey.

“It is a principle of law, unfortunate man,” remarked the châtelain, removing the spectacles he had mounted in order to read the list, “that effects wrongly taken from one robbed criminate him in whose possession they are found, unless he can render a clear account of the transfer. What hast thou to say on this head?”

“Not a syllable, Signore; I must refer you and all others to the dog, who alone can furnish the history of these baubles. It is clear that I am little known in the Valais, for Maso never deals in trifles insignificant as these.”

“The pretext will not serve thee, Maso; thou triflest in an affair of life and death. Wilt thou confess thy crime, ere we proceed to extremities?”

“That I have been long at open variance with the law, Signor Castellano, is true, if you will have it so; but I am as innocent of this

man's death as the noble Baron de Willading here. That the Genoese authorities were looking for me, on account of some secret understanding that the republic has with its old enemies the Savoyards, I frankly allow too; but it was a matter of gain, and not of blood. I have taken life in my time, Signore, but it has been in fair combat, whether the cause was just or not."

"Enough has been proved against thee already to justify the use of the torture in order to have the rest."

"Nay, I do not see the necessity of this appeal," remarked the bailiff. "There lies the dead, here is his property, and yonder stands the criminal. It is an affair that only wants the forms, methinks, to be committed presently to the axe."

"Of all the foul offences against God and man," resumed the Valaisan, in the manner of one that is about to sentence, "that which hastens a living soul, unshrived, un-

confessed, unprepared, and with all its sins upon it, into another state of being and into the dread presence of his Almighty judge, is the heaviest and the last to be overlooked by the law. There is less excuse for thee, Thomaso Santi, for thy education has been far superior to thy fortunes, and thou hast passed a life of vice and violence in opposition to thy reason and what was taught thee in youth. Thou hast, therefore, little ground for hope, since the state I serve loves justice in its purity above all other qualities."

"Nobly spoken! Herr Châtelain," cried the bailiff, "and in a manner to send repentance like a dagger into the criminal's soul. What is thought and said in Valais we echo in Vaud, and I would not that any I love stood in thy shoes, Maso, for the honours of the emperor!"

"Signori, you have both spoken, and it is as men whom Fortune hath favoured since childhood. It is easy for those who are in prosperity to be upright in all that touches

money, though, by the light of the blessed Maria's countenance ! I do think there is more coveted by those who have much than by the hardy and industrious poor. I am no stranger to that which men call justice, and know how to honour and respect its decrees as they deserve. Justice, Signori, is the weak man's scourge and the strong man's sword : it is a breast-plate and back-plate to the one and a weapon to be parried by the other. In short, it is a word of fair import on the tongue, but of most unequal application in the deed."

" We overlook thy language in consideration of the pass to which thy crimes have reduced thee, unhappy man, though it is an aggravation of thy offences, since it proves thou hast sinned equally against thyself and us. This affair need go no farther ; the headsmen and the other travellers may be dismissed ; we commit the Italian to the irons."

Maso heard the order without alarm, though he appeared to be maintaining a violent strug-

gle with himself. He paced the chapel rapidly and muttered much between his teeth. His words were not intelligible, though they were evidently of strong, if not violent, import. At length he stopped short, in the manner of one who had decided.

“ This matter grows serious,” he said ; “ it will admit of no farther hesitation. Signor Grimaldi, command all to leave the chapel in whose discretion you have not the most perfect confidence.”

“ I see none to be distrusted,” answered the surprised Genoese.

“ Then will I speak.”

CHAPTER IX.

Thy voice to us is wind among still woods.

SHELLEY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the gravity of the facts which were accumulating against him, Maso had maintained throughout the foregoing scene much of that steady self-possession and discernment which were the fruits of adventure in scenes of danger, long exposure, and multiplied hazards. To these causes of coolness, might be added the iron-like nerves inherited from nature. The latter were not easily disturbed, however critical the state to which he was reduced. Still he had changed colour, and his manner had that thoughtful and un-

settled air which denote the consciousness of being in circumstances that require uncommon wariness and judgment. But his final opinion appeared to be formed when he made the appeal mentioned in the close of the last chapter, and he now only waited for the two or three officials who were present to retire, before he pursued his purpose. When the door was closed, leaving none but his examiners, Sigismund, Balthazar, and the group of females in the side-chapel, he turned, with singular respect of manner, and addressed himself exclusively to the Signor Grimaldi, as if the judgment which was to decide his fate depended solely on his will.

“Signore,” he said, “there has been much secret allusion between us, and I suppose that it is unnecessary for me to say, that you are known to me.”

“I have already recognized thee for a countryman,” coldly returned the Genoese; “it is vain, however, to imagine the circumstance can

avail a murderer. If any consideration could induce me to forget the claims of justice, the recollection of thy good service on the Leman would prove thy best friend. As it is, I fear thou hast nought to expect from me."

Maso was silent. He looked the other steadily in the face, as if he would study his character, though he guardedly prevented his manner from losing its appearance of profound respect.

"Signore, the chances of life were greatly with you at the birth. You were born the heir of a powerful house, in which gold is more plenty than woes in a poor man's cabin, and you have not been made to learn by experience how hard it is to keep down the longings for those pleasures which the base metal will purchase, when we see others rolling in its luxuries."

"This plea will not avail thee, unfortunate man; else were there an end of human institutions. The difference of which thou speak-

est is a simple consequence of the rights of property; and even the barbarian admits the sacred duty of respecting that which is another's."

"A word from one like you, illustrious Signore, would open for me the road to Piedmont," continued Maso, unmoved: "once across the frontiers, it shall be my care never to molest the rocks of Valais again. I ask only what I have been the means of saving, *eccellenza*,—life."

The Signor Grimaldi shook his head, though it was very evident that he declined the required intercession with much reluctance. He and old Melchior de Willading exchanged glances; and all who noted this silent intercourse understood it to say, that each considered duty to God a higher obligation than gratitude for a service rendered to themselves.

"Ask gold, or what thou wilt else, but do not ask me to aid in defeating justice. Gladly would I have given for the asking, twenty

times the value of those miserable baubles for whose possession, Maso, thou hast rashly taken life ; but I cannot become a sharer of thy crime, by refusing atonement to his friends. It is too late ; I cannot befriend thee now if I would."

"Thou hearest the answer of this noble gentleman," interposed the châtelain ; "it is wise and seemly, and thou greatly overratest his influence or that of any present, if thou fanciest the laws can be set aside at pleasure. Wert thou a noble thyself, or the son of a prince, judgment would have its way in the Valais !"

Maso smiled wildly ; and yet the expression of his glittering eye was so ironical as to cause uneasiness in his judge. The Signor Grimaldi, too, observed the audacious confidence of his air with distrust, for his spirit had taken secret alarm on a subject that was rarely long absent from his thoughts.

"If thou meanest more than has been said,"

exclaimed the latter, "for the sake of the blessed Maria be explicit!"

"Signor Melchior," continued Maso, turning to the baron, "I did you and your daughter fair service on the lake!"

"That thou didst, Maso, we are both willing to admit, and were it in Berne,—but the laws are made equally for all, the great and the humble, they who have friends, and they who have none."

"I have heard of this act on the lake," put in Peterchen; "and unless fame lieth—which, Heaven knows, fame is apt enough to do, except in giving their just dues to those who are in high trusts,—thou didst conduct thyself in that affair, Maso, like a loyal and well-taught mariner: but the honourable châtelain has well remarked, that holy justice must have way before all other things. Justice is represented as blind, in order that it may be seen she is no respecter of persons; and wert thou an Avoyer, the decree must come. Reflect

maturely, therefore, on all the facts, and thou wilt come, in time, to see the impossibility of thine own innocence. First, thou left'st the path, being ahead of Jacques Colis, to enter it at a moment suited to thy purposes: then thou took'st his life for gold ——”

“ But this is believing that to be true, Signor Bailiff, which is only yet supposed,” interrupted Il Maledetto; “ I left the path to give Nettuno his charge apart from curious eyes; and, as for the gold of which you speak, would the owner of a necklace of that price be apt to barter his soul against a booty like this which comes of Jacques Colis !”

Maso spoke with a contempt which did not serve his cause; for it left the impression among the auditors, that he weighed the morality and immorality of his acts simply by their result.

“ It is time to bring this to an end,” said the Signor Grimaldi, who had been thoughtful and melancholy while the others spoke: “ thou

hast something to address particularly to me, Maso; but if thy claim is no better than that of our common country, I grieve to say, it cannot be admitted."

" Signore, the voice of a Doge of Genoa is not often raised in vain, when he would use it in behalf of another !"

At this sudden announcement of the traveller's rank, the monks and the châtelain started in surprise, and a low murmur of wonder was heard in the chapel. The smile of Peterchen, and the composure of the Baron de Willading, however, showed that they, at least, learned nothing new. The bailiff whispered the prior significantly, and from that moment his deportment towards the Genoese took still more of the character of formal and official respect. On the other hand, the Signor Grimaldi remained composed, like one accustomed to receive deference, though his manner lost the slight degree of restraint that had been imposed by the observance of the temporary character he had assumed.

“The voice of a Doge of Genoa should not be used in intercession, unless in behalf of the innocent,” he replied, keeping his severe eye fastened on the countenance of the accused.

Again Il Maledetto seemed labouring with some secret that struggled on his tongue.

“Speak,” continued the Prince of Genoa ; for it was, in truth, that high functionary, who had journeyed incognito, in the hope of meeting his ancient friend at the sports of Vévey. “Speak, Maso, if thou hast aught serious to urge in favour of thyself ; time presses, and the sight of one to whom I owe so much in this great jeopardy, without the power to aid him, grows painful.”

“Signor Doge, though deaf to pity, you cannot be deaf to nature.”

The countenance of the Doge became livid ; his lips trembled even to the appearance of convulsions.

“Deal no longer in mystery, man of blood !” he said with energy. “What is thy meaning?”

“ I entreat your eccellenza to be calm. Necessity forces me to speak ; for, as you see, I stand between this revelation and the block—I am Bartolo Contini !”

The groan that escaped the compressed lips of the Doge, the manner in which he sank into a seat, and the hue of death that settled over his aged countenance, until it was more ghastly even than that of the unhappy victim of violence, drew all present, in wonder and alarm, around his chair. Signing for those who pressed upon him to give way, the Prince sat gazing at Maso, with eyes that appeared ready to burst from their sockets.

“ Thou Bartolomeo !” he uttered huskily, as if horror had frozen his voice.

“ I am Bartolo, Signore, and no other. He who goes through many scenes hath occasion for many names. Even your Highness travels at times under a cloud.”

The Doge continued to stare on the speaker with the fixedness of regard that one might be

supposed to fasten on a creature of unearthly existence.

“ Melchior,” he said slowly, turning his eyes from one to the other of the forms that filled them,—for Sigismund had advanced to the side of Maso, in kind concern for the old man’s condition, — “ Melchior, we are but feeble and miserable creatures in the hand of one who looks upon the proudest and happiest of us, as we look upon the worm that crawls the earth ! What are hope, and honour, and our fondest love, in the great train of events that time heaves from its womb, bringing forth to our confusion ? Are we proud ? fortune revenges itself for our want of humility by its scorn. Are we happy ? it is but the calm that precedes the storm. Are we great ? it is but to lead us into abuses that will justify our fall. Are we honoured ? stains tarnish our good name in spite of all our care ! ”

“ He who puts his trust in the son of Maria need never despair ! ” whispered the worthy

clavier, touched nearly to tears by the sudden distress of one whom he had learned to respect. "Let the fortunes of the world pass away, or change as they will, his chastening love outliveth time !"

The Signor Grimaldi, for, though the elected of Genoa, such was in truth the family name of the Doge, turned his vacant gaze for an instant on the Augustine, but it soon reverted to the forms and faces of Maso and Sigismund, who still stood before him, filling his thoughts even more than his sight.

"Yes, there is a power—" he resumed, "a great and beneficent Being to equalize our fortunes here, and when we pass into another state of being, loaded with the wrongs of this, we shall have justice ! Tell me, Melchior, thou who knew'st my youth, who read'st my heart when it was open as day, what was there in it to deserve this punishment ? Here is Balthazar, come of a race of executioners—a man condemned of opinion—that prejudice besets with

a hedge of hatred—that men point at with their fingers, and whom the dogs are ready to bay—this Balthazar is the father of that gallant youth, whose form is so perfect, whose spirit is so noble, and whose life so pure ; while I, the last of a line that is lost in the obscurity of time, the wealthiest of my land, and the chosen of my peers, am accursed with an outcast, a common brigand, a murderer for the sole prop of my decaying house—with this *Il Maledetto*—this man accursed—for a son !”

A movement of astonishment escaped the listeners, even the Baron de Willading not suspecting the real cause of his friend's distress. Maso alone was unmoved ; for while the aged father betrayed the keenness of his anguish, the son discovered none of that sympathy of which even a life like his might be supposed to have left some remains in the heart of a child. He was cold, collected, observant, and master of his smallest action.

“ I will not believe this,” exclaimed the

Doge, whose very soul revolted at this unfeeling apathy, even more than at the disgrace of being the father of such a child; "thou art not he thou pretendest to be; this foul lie is uttered that my natural feelings may interpose between thee and the block! Prove thy truth, or I abandon thee to thy fate."

"Signore, I would have saved this unhappy exhibition, but you would not. That I am Bartolo this signet, your own gift sent to be my protection in a strait like this, will show. It is, moreover, easy for me to prove what I say by a hundred witnesses who are living in Genoa."

The Signor Grimaldi stretched forth a hand that trembled like an aspen to receive the ring, a jewel of little price, but a signet that he had, in truth, sent to be an instrument of recognition between him and his child, in the event of any sudden calamity befalling the latter. He groaned as he gazed at its well remembered emblems, for its identity was only too plain.

“ Maso—Bartolo—Gaetano—for such, miserable boy, is thy real appellation—thou canst not know how bitter is the pang that an unworthy child brings to the parent, else would thy life have been different. Oh! Gaetano! Gaetano! what a foundation art thou for a father’s hopes! What a subject for a father’s love! I saw thee last a smiling innocent cherub, in thy nurse’s arms, and I find thee with a blighted soul, the pure fountain of thy mind corrupted, a form sealed with the stamp of vice, and with hands died in blood; prematurely old in body, and with a spirit that hath already the hellish taint of the damned!”

“ Signore, you find me as the chances of a wild life have willed. The world and I have been at loggerheads this many a year, and in trifling with its laws I take my revenge of its abuse—” warmly returned Il Maledetto, for his spirit began to be aroused. “Thou bear’st hard upon me, Doge—father—or what thou wilt—and I should be little worthy

of my lineage, did I not meet thy charges as they are made. Compare thine own career with mine, and let it be proclaimed by sound of trumpet, if thou wilt, which hath most reason to be proud, and which to exult. Thou wert reared in the hopes and honours of our name ; thou passed'st thy youth in the pursuit of arms according to thy fancy, and, when tired of change, and willing to narrow thy pleasures, thou looked'st about thee for a maiden to become the mother of thy successor ; thou turned'st a wishing eye on one young, fair, and noble, but whose affections, as her faith, were solemnly, irretrievably plighted to another."

The Doge shuddered and veiled his eyes ; but he eagerly interrupted Maso.

" Her kinsman was unworthy of her love," he cried ; " he was an outcast, and little better than thyself, unhappy boy, except in the chances of condition."

" It matters not, Signore ; God had not made you the arbiter of her fate. In tempt-

ing her family by your greater riches, you crushed two hearts, and destroyed the hopes of your fellow-creatures. In her was sacrificed an angel, mild and pure as this fair creature who is now listening so breathlessly to my words; in him a fierce untamed spirit, that had only the greater need of management, since it was as likely to go wrong as right. Before your son was born, this unhappy rival, poor in hopes as in wealth, had become desperate, and the mother of your child sank a victim to her ceaseless regrets, at her own want of faith as much as for his follies."

"Thy mother was deluded, Gaetano; she never knew the real qualities of her cousin, or a soul like her's would have loathed the wretch."

"Signore, it matters not," continued Il Maledetto, with a ruthless perseverance of intention, and a coolness of manner that would seem to merit the description which had just been given of his spirit, that of possessing a

hellish taint ; “ she loved him with a woman’s heart ; and, with a woman’s ingenuity and confidence, she ascribed his fall to despair for her loss.”

“ Oh, Melchior ! Melchior ! this is fearfully true !” groaned the Doge.

“ It is so true, Signore, that it should be written on my mother’s tomb. We are children of a fiery climate ; the passions burn in our Italy like the hot sun that glows there. When despair drove the disappointed lover to acts that rendered him an outlaw, the passage to revenge was short. Your child was stolen, hid from your view, and cast upon the world under circumstances that left little doubt of his living in bitterness, and dying under the contempt, if not the curses, of his fellows. All this, Signor Grimaldi, is the fruit of your own errors. Had you respected the affections of an innocent girl, the sad consequences to yourself and me might have been avoided.”

"Is this man's history to be believed, Gaetano?" demanded the baron, who had more than once betrayed a wish to check the rude tongue of the speaker.

"I do not—I cannot—deny it; I never saw my own conduct in this criminal light before, and yet now it all seems frightfully true!"

Il Maledetto laughed. Those around him thought his untimely merriment resembled the mockery of a devil.

"This is the manner in which men continue to sin, while they lay claim to the merit of innocence!" he added. "Let the great of the earth give but half the care to prevent, that they show to punish, offences against themselves, and what is now called justice, will no longer be a stalking-horse to enable a few to live at the cost of the rest. As for me, I am proof of what noble blood and illustrious ancestry can do for themselves! Stolen when a child, Nature has had fair play in my temperament, which I own is more disposed

to wild adventure and manly risks than to the pleasures of marble halls. Noble father of mine, were this spirit dressed up in the guise of a senator, or a doge, it might fare badly with Genoa !”

“ Unfortunate man,” exclaimed the indignant prior, “ is this language for a child to use to his father ? Dost thou forget that the blood of Jacques Colis is on thy soul ?”

“ Holy Augustine, the candour with which my general frailties are allowed, should gain me credit when I speak of particular accusations. By the hopes and piety of the reverend canon of Aosta, thy patron saint and founder ! I am guiltless of this crime. Question Nettuno as you will, or turn the affair in every way that usage warrants, and let appearances take what shape they may, I swear to you my innocence. If ye think that fear of punishment tempts me to utter a lie, under these holy appeals, (he crossed himself with reverence,) ye do injustice both to my courage

and to my love of the saints. The only son of the reigning Doge of Genoa hath little to fear from the headsman's blow !”

Again Maso laughed. It was the confidence of one who knew the world, and who was too audacious even to consult appearances unless it suited his humour, breaking out in very wantonness. A man who had led his life was not to learn at this late day, that the want of eyes in Justice oftener means blindness to the faults of the privileged, than the impartiality that is assumed by the pretending emblem. The châtelain, the prior, the bailiff, the clavier, and the Baron de Willading, looked at each other like men bewildered. The mental agony of the Doge formed a contrast so frightful with the heartless and cruel insensibility of the son, that the sight chilled their blood. The sentiment was only the more common from the silent but general conviction, that the unfeeling criminal must be permitted to escape. There was, indeed, no precedent for leading the child

of a prince to the block, unless it were for an offence which touched the preservation of the father's interests. Much was said in maxims and apophthegms of the purity and necessity of rigid impartiality in administering the affairs of life, but neither had attained his years and experience without obtaining glimpses of practical things, that taught him to foresee the impunity of Maso. Too much violence would be done to a factitious and tottering edifice were it known that a prince's son was no better than one of the vilest, and the lingering feelings of paternity were certain at last to cast a shield before the offender.

The embarrassment and doubt attending such a state of things was happily, but quite unexpectedly, relieved by the interference of Balthazar. The headsman until this moment, had been a silent attentive listener to all that passed, but now he pressed himself into the circle, and looking, in his quiet man-

ner, from one to the other, he spoke with the assurance that the certainty of having important intelligence to impart is apt to give even to the meekest, in the presence of those whom they habitually respect.

“ This broken tale of Maso’s,” he said, “ is removing a cloud that has lain for near thirty years before my eyes. Is it true, illustrious Doge, for such it appears is your princely state, that a son of your noble stock was stolen and kept in secret from your love, through the vindictive enmity of a rival ?”

“ True !—alas, too true ! Would it had pleased the blessed Maria, who so cherished his mother, to call his spirit to Heaven, ere the curse befel him and me !”

“ Your pardon, great Prince, if I press you with questions at a moment so painful. But it is in your own interest. Suffer that I ask in what year this calamity befel your family ?”

The Signor Grimaldi signed for his friend to assume the office of answering these extraor-

dinary interrogatories, while he buried his own venerable face in his cloak, to conceal his anguish from curious eyes. Melchior de Willading regarded the headsman in surprise, and for an instant he was disposed to repel questions that seemed importunate, but the earnest countenance and mild, decent, demeanour of Balthazar, overcame his repugnance to pursue the subject.

“The child was stolen in the autumn of the year 1693,” he answered, his previous conferences with his friend having put him in possession of all the leading facts of the history.

“And his age?”

“Was near a twelvemonth.”

“Can you inform me what became of the profligate noble who committed this foul robbery?”

“The fate of the Signor Pantaleone Serrani has never been truly known; though there is a dark rumour that he died in a brawl in our

own Switzerland. That he is dead, there is no cause to doubt."

"And his person, noble Freiherr—a description of his person is now only wanting to throw the light of a noon-day sun, on what has so long been night!"

"I knew the unlucky Signor Pantaleone well in early youth. At the time mentioned his years might have been thirty, his form was seemly and of middle height, his features bore the Italian outline, with the dark eye, swarthy skin and glossy hair of the climate. More than this, with the exception of a finger lost in one of our affairs in Lombardy, I cannot say."

"This is enough," returned the attentive Balthazar. "Dismiss your grief, princely Doge, and prepare your heart for a new-found joy. Instead of being the parent of this reckless freebooter, God at length pities, and returns your real son in Sigismund, a child that might gladden the heart of any parent, though he were an emperor!"

This extraordinary declaration was made to stunned and confounded listeners. A cry of alarm burst from the lips of Marguerite, who approached the group in the centre of the chapel, trembling and anxious as if the grave were about to rob her of a treasure.

"What is this I hear!" exclaimed the mother, whose sensitiveness was the first to take alarm. "Are my half-formed suspicions then too true, Balthazar? Am I, indeed without a son? I know thou would'st not trifle with a mother, or mislead this stricken noble in a thing like this! Speak, again, that I may know the truth—Sigismund—"

"Is not our child," answered the headsman, with an impress of truth in his manner that went far to bring conviction; "our own boy died in the blessed state of infancy, and, to save thy feelings, this youth was substituted in his place by me without thy knowledge."

Marguerite moved nearer to the young man. She gazed wistfully at his flushed ex-

cited features, in which pain at being so unexpectedly torn from the bosom of a family he had always deemed his own, was fearfully struggling with a wild and indefinite delight at finding himself suddenly relieved from a load he had long found so grievous to be borne. Interpreting the latter expression with jealous affection, she bent her face to her bosom, and retreated in silence among her companions to weep.

In the mean time a sudden and tumultuous surprise took possession of the different listeners, which was modified and exhibited according to their respective characters, or to the amount of interest that each had in the truth or falsehood of what had just been announced. The Doge clung to the hope, improbable as it seemed, with a tenacity proportioned to his recent anguish, while Sigismund stood like one beside himself. His eye wandered from the simple and benevolent, but degraded, man, whom he had believed to be his father, to the

venerable and imposing-looking noble who was now so unexpectedly presented in that sacred character. The sobs of Marguerite reached his ears, and first recalled him to recollection. They came blended with the fresh grief of Christine, who felt as if ruthless death had now robbed her of a brother. There was also the struggling emotion of one whose interest in him had a still more tender and engrossing claim.

“This is so wonderful,” said the trembling Doge, who dreaded lest the next syllable that was uttered might destroy the blessed illusion, “so wildly improbable, that, though my soul yearns to believe it, my reason refuses credence. It is not enough to utter this sudden intelligence, Balthazar ; it must be proved. Furnish but a moiety of the evidence that is necessary to establish a legal fact, and I will render thee the richest of thy class in Christendom. And thou, Sigismund, come close to my heart, noble boy,” he added, with outstretched arms, “that I may bless thee, while there is hope—

that I may feel one beat of a father's pulses—
one instant of a father's joy !”

Sigismund knelt at the venerable Prince's feet, and receiving his head on his shoulder, their tears mingled. But even at that precious moment both felt a sense of insecurity, as if the exquisite pleasure of so pure a happiness were too intense to last. Maso looked upon this scene with cold displeasure. His averted face denoted a stronger feeling than disappointment, though the power of natural sympathy was so strong as to draw evidences of its force from the eyes of all the others present.

“ Bless thee, bless thee, my child, my dearly beloved son !” murmured the Doge, lending himself to the improbable tale of Balthazar for a delicious instant, and kissing the cheeks of Sigismund as one would embrace a smiling infant ; “ may the God of heaven and earth, his only Son, and the holy Virgin undefiled, unite to bless thee, here and hereafter, be thou whom thou mayest ! I owe thee one precious

instant of happiness, such as I have never tasted before. To find a child would not be enough to give it birth; but to believe thee to be that son touches on the joys of paradise!"

Sigismund fervently kissed the hand that had rested affectionately on his head during this solemn benediction; then feeling the necessity of having some guarantee for the existence of emotions so sweet, he arose and made a warm and strong appeal to him who had so long passed for his father to be more explicit, and to justify his new-born hopes by some evidence better than his simple asseveration; for, solemnly as the latter had been made, and profound as he knew to be the reverence for truth, which the despised headsman not only entertained himself but inculcated in all in whom he had any interest, the revelation he had just made seemed too improbable to resist the doubts of one who knew his happiness to be the fruit or the forfeiture of its veracity.

CHAPTER X.

We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep ;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day ;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep ;
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away.

SHELLEY.

THE tale of Balthazar was simple but eloquent. His union with Marguerite, in spite of the world's obloquy and injustice, had been blessed by the wise and merciful Being who knew how to temper the wind to the shorn lamb.

“ We knew we were all to each other,” he continued, after briefly alluding to the early history of their births and love ; “ and we felt the necessity of living for ourselves. Ye that are

born to honours, who meet with smiles and respectful looks in all ye meet, can know little of the feeling which binds together the unhappy. When God gave us our first-born, as he lay a smiling babe in her lap, looking up into her eye with the innocence that most likens man to angels, Marguerite shed bitter tears at the thought of such a creature's being condemned by the laws to shed the blood of men. The reflection that he was to live for ever an outcast from his kind was bitter to a mother's heart. We had made many offers to the canton to be released ourselves, from this charge; we had prayed them—Herr Melchior, you should know how earnestly we have prayed the council, to be suffered to live like others, and without this accursed doom—but they would not. They said the usage was ancient, that change was dangerous, and that what God willed must come to pass. We could not bear that the burthen we found so hard to endure our-

selves should go down for ever as a curse upon our descendants, Herr Doge," he continued, raising his meek face in the pride of honesty ; " it is well for those who are the possessors of honours to be proud of their privileges, but when the inheritance is one of wrongs and scorn, when the evil eyes of our fellows are upon us, the heart sickens. Such was our feeling when we looked upon our first-born. The wish to save him from our own disgrace was uppermost, and we bethought us of the means."

" Ay !" sternly interrupted Marguerite, " I parted with my child, and silenced a mother's longings, proud nobles, that he might not become the tool of your ruthless policy ; I gave up a mother's joy in nourishing and in cherishing her young, that the little innocent might live among his fellows, as God had created him, their equal and not their victim !"

Balthazar paused, as was usual with him whenever his energetic wife manifested any of

her strong and masculine qualities, and, then, when deep silence had followed her remark, he proceeded.

“ We wanted not for wealth ; all we asked was to be like others in the world’s respect. With our money it was very easy to find those in another canton, who were willing to take the little Sigismund into their keeping. After which, a feigned death, and a private burial did the rest. The deceit was easily practised, for as few cared for the griefs as for the happiness of the headsman’s family ! The child had drawn near the end of its first year, when I was called upon to execute my office on a stranger. The criminal had taken life in a drunken brawl in one of the towns of the canton, and he was said to be a man that had trifled with the precious gifts of birth, it being suspected that he was noble. I went with a heavy heart, for never did I strike a blow without praying God it might be the last ; but it was heavier when I reached the place where

the culprit awaited his fate. The tidings of my poor son's death reached me as I put foot on the threshold of the desolate prison, and I turned aside to weep for my own woes, before I entered to see my victim. The condemned man had great unwillingness to die; he had sent for me many hours before the fatal moment, to make acquaintance, as he said, with the hand that was to despatch him to the presence of his last and eternal judge."

Balthazar paused; he appeared to meditate on a scene that had probably left indelible impressions on his mind. Shuddering involuntarily, he raised his eyes from the pavement of the chapel, and continued the recital, always in the same subdued and tranquil manner.

"I have been the unwilling instrument of many a violent death,—I have seen the most reckless sinners in the agonies of sudden and compelled repentance, but never have I witnessed so wild and fearful a struggle between earth and heaven—the world and the grave—

passion and the rebuke of providence—as attended the last hours of that unhappy man ! There were moments in which the mild spirit of Christ won upon his evil mood 'tis true, but the picture was, in general, that of revenge so fierce, that the powers of hell alone could give it birth in a human heart. He had with him an infant of an age just fitted to be taken from the breast. This child appeared to awaken the fiercest conflicting feelings ; he both yearned over it and detested its sight, though hatred seemed most to prevail.”

“ This was horrible ! ” murmured the Doge.

“ It was the more horrible, Herr Doge, that it should come from one who was justly condemned to the axe. He rejected the priests ; he would have nought of any but me. My soul loathed the wretch—yet so few ever showed an interest in us—and it would have been cruel to desert a dying man ! At the end, he placed the child in my care, furnishing more gold than was sufficient to rear it frugally to

the age of manhood, and leaving other valuables which I have kept as proofs that might some day be useful. All I could learn of the infant's origin was simply this. It came from Italy and of Italian parents; its mother died soon after its birth,"—a groan escaped the Doge—"its father still lived, and was the object of the criminal's implacable hatred, as its mother had been of his ardent love; its birth was noble, and it had been baptized in the bosom of the church by the name of Gaetano."

"It must be he!—it is—it must be my beloved son!—" exclaimed the Doge, unable to control himself any longer. He spread wide his arms and Sigismund threw himself upon his bosom, though there still remained fearful apprehensions that all he heard was a dream. "Go on—go on—excellent Balthazar," added the Signor Grimaldi, drying his eyes, and struggling to command himself. "I shall have no peace until all is revealed to the last syllable of thy wonderful, thy glorious tale!"

“The remains but little more to say, Herr Doge. The fatal hour arrived, and the criminal was transported to the place where he was to give up his life. While seated in the chair in which he received the fatal blow, his spirit underwent infernal torments. I have reason to think that there were moments when he would gladly have made his peace with God. But the demons prevailed; he died in his sins! From the hour when he committed the little Gaetano to my keeping, I did not cease to intreat to be put in possession of the secret of the child's birth, but the sole answer I received was an order to appropriate the gold to my own uses, and to adopt the boy as my own. The sword was in my hand, and the signal to strike was given, when, for the last time, I asked the name of the infant's family and country, as a duty I could not neglect. ‘He is thine—he is thine—’ was the answer; ‘tell me, Balthazar, is thy office hereditary, as is wont in these regions?’ I was compelled, as ye know, to say

it was. 'Then adopt the urchin; rear him to fatten on the blood of his fellows!' It was mockery to trifle with such a spirit. When his head fell it still had on its fierce features traces of the infernal triumph with which his spirit had departed!"

"The monster was a just sacrifice to the laws of the canton!" exclaimed the single-minded bailiff. "Thou seest, Herr Melchior, that we do well in arming the hand of the executioner, in spite of all the sentiment of the weak-minded. Such a wretch was surely unworthy to live."

This burst of official felicitation from Peterchen, who rarely neglected an occasion to draw a conclusion favourable to the existing order of things, like most of those who reap their exclusive advantage, and to the prejudice of innovation, produced little attention: all present were too much absorbed in the facts related by Balthazar, to turn aside to speak, or think, of other matters.

"What became of the boy?" demanded the

worthy clavier, who had taken as deep an interest as the rest, in the progress of the narrative.

“I could not desert him, father; nor did I wish to. He came into my guardianship at a moment when God, to reprove our repinings at a lot that he had chosen to impose, had taken our own little Sigismund to heaven. I filled the place of the dead infant with my living charge; I gave to him the name of my own son, and I can say confidently, that I transferred to him the love I had borne my own issue; though time, and use, and a knowledge of the child’s character, were perhaps necessary to complete the last. Marguerite never knew the deception, though a mother’s instinct and tenderness took the alarm and raised suspicions. We have never spoken freely on this together, and like you, she now heareth the truth for the first time.”

“’Twas a fearful mystery between God and my own heart!” murmured the woman; “I for-

bore to trouble it—Sigismund, or Gaetano, or whatever you will have his name, filled my affections, and I strove to be satisfied. The boy is dear to me, and ever will be, though you seat him on a throne; but Christine—the poor stricken Christine—is truly the child of my bosom!”

Sigismund went and knelt at the feet of her whom he had ever believed his mother, and earnestly begged her blessing and continued affection. The tears streamed from Marguerite's eyes, as she willingly bestowed the first, and promised never to withhold the last.

“Hast thou any of the trinkets or garments that were given thee with the child, or can'st render an account of the place where they are still to be found?” demanded the Doge, whose whole mind was too deeply set on appeasing his doubts to listen to aught else.

“They are all here in the convent. The gold has been fairly committed to Sigismund, to form his equipment as a soldier. The

child was kept apart, receiving such education as a learned priest could give, till of an age to serve, and then I sent him to bear arms in Italy, which I knew to be the country of his birth, though I never knew to what Prince his allegiance was due. The time had now come when I thought it due to the youth to let him know the real nature of the tie between us, but I shrank from paining Marguerite and myself, and I even did his heart the credit to believe that he would rather belong to us, humble and despised though we be, than find himself a nameless outcast, without home, country, or parentage. It was necessary, however, to speak, and it was my purpose to reveal the truth, here at the convent in the presence of Christine. For this reason, and to enable Sigmund to make enquiries for his family, the effects received from the unhappy criminal with the child were placed among his baggage secretly. They are, at this moment, on the mountain "

The venerable old prince trembled violently ; for, with the intense feeling of one who dreaded that his dearest hopes might yet be disappointed, he feared, while he most wished, to consult these mute but veracious witnesses.

“ Let them be produced !—let them be instantly produced and examined !” he whispered eagerly to those around him. Then turning slowly to the immoveable Maso, he demanded —“ And thou, man of falsehood and of blood ! what dost thou reply to this clear and probable tale ?”

Il Maledetto smiled, as if superior to a weakness that had blinded the others. The expression of his countenance was filled with that look of calm superiority which certainty gives to the well-informed over the doubting and deceived.”

“ I have to reply, Signore, and honoured father,” he coolly answered, “ that Balthazar hath right cleverly related a tale that hath been ingeniously devised. That I am Bartolo,

I repeat to thee, can be proved by a hundred living tongues in Italy. Thou best knowest who Bartolo Contini is, Doge of Genoa."

"He speaks the truth," returned the prince, dropping his head in disappointment. "Oh! Melchior, I have had but too sure proofs of what he intimates! I have long been certain that this wretched Bartolo is my son, though never before have I been cursed with his presence. Bad as I was taught to think him, my worst fears had not painted him as I now find the truth would warrant."

"Has there not been some fraud — art thou not the dupe of some conspiracy of which money has been the object?"

The Doge shook his head in a way to prove that he could not possibly flatter himself with such a hope.

"Never: my offers of money have always been rejected."

"Why should I take the gold of my father,"

added *Il Maledetto* ; “ my own skill and courage more than suffice for my wants ? ”

The nature of the answer and the composed demeanour of Maso produced an embarrassing pause.

“ Let the two stand forth and be confronted,” said the puzzled clavier at length ; “ nature often reveals the truth when the utmost powers of man are at fault — if either is the true child of the prince, we should find some resemblance to the father to support his claim.”

The test, though of doubtful virtue, was eagerly adopted, for the truth had now become so involved, as to excite a keen interest in all present. The desire to explain the mystery was general, and the slightest means of attaining such an end became of a value proportionate to the difficulty of effecting the object. Sigismund and Maso were placed beneath the lamp, where its light was strongest, and every eye turned eagerly to their countenances, in

order to discover, or to fancy it discovered, some of those secret signs by which the mysterious affinities of nature are to be traced. A more puzzling examination could not well have been essayed. There was proof to give the victory to each of the pretenders, if such a term may be used with propriety as it concerns the passive Sigismund, and much to defeat the claims of the latter. In the olive-coloured tint, the dark, rich, rolling eye, and in stature, the advantage was altogether with Maso, whose outline of countenance and penetrating expression had also a resemblance to those of the Doge, so marked as to render it quite apparent to any who wished to find it. The habits of the mariner had probably diminished the likeness, but it was too obviously there to escape detection. That hardened and rude appearance, the consequence of exposure, which rendered it difficult to pronounce within ten years of his real age, contributed a little to conceal what might be termed the latent character of his

countenance, but the features themselves were undeniably a rude copy of the more polished lineaments of the Prince.

The case was less clear as respects Sigismund. The advantage of ruddy and vigorous youth rendered him such a resemblance of the Doge—in the points where it existed—as we find between the aged and those portraits which have been painted in their younger and happier days. The bold outline was not unlike that of the noble features of the venerable Prince, but neither the eye, the hair, nor the complexion, had the hues of Italy.

“Thou seest,” said Maso, tauntingly, when the disappointed clavier admitted the differences in the latter particulars, “this is an imposition that will not pass. I swear to you, as there is faith in man, and hope for the dying Christian, that so far as any know their parentage, I am the child of Gaetano Grimaldi, the present Doge of Genoa, and of no other man! May the saints desert me!—the blessed Mother

of God be deaf to my prayers! — and all men hunt me with their curses, if I say aught in this but holy truth!”

The fearful energy with which Maso uttered this solemn appeal, and a certain sincerity that marked his manner, and perhaps we might even say his character, in spite of the dissolute recklessness of his principles, served greatly to weaken the growing opinion in favour of his competitor.

“And this noble youth?” asked the sorrowing Doge—“this generous and elevated boy, whom I have already held next to my heart, with so much of a father’s joy—who and what is he?”

“Eccellenza, I wish to say nothing against the Signor Sigismondo. He is a gallant swimmer, and a stanch support in time of need. Be he Swiss, or Genoese, either country may be proud of him; but self-love teaches us all to take care of our own interests before those of another. It would be far pleasanter to

dwell in the Palazzo Grimaldi, on our warm and sunny gulf, honoured and esteemed as the heir of a noble name, than to be cutting heads in Berne ; and honest Balthazar does but follow his instinct, in seeking preferment for his son !”

Each eye now turned on the headsman, who quailed not under the scrutiny, but maintained the firm front of one conscious that he had done no wrong.

“ I have not said that Sigismund is the child of any,” he answered in his meek manner, but with a steadiness that won him credit with the listeners. “ I have only said that he belongs not to me. No father need wish a worthier son, and heaven knows that I yield my own claims with a sorrow that it would be grievous to bear, did I not hope a better fortune for him than any which can come from a connexion with a race accursed. The likeness which is seen in Maso, and which Sigismund is thought to want, proves little, noble gentlemen and reverend monks, for all who have looked closely

into these matters know that resemblances are as often found between the distant branches of the same family, as between those who are more nearly united. Sigismund is not of us, and none can see any trace of either my own or of Marguerite's family in his person or features."

Balthazar paused that there might be an examination of this fact, and, in truth, the most ingenious fancy could not have detected the least affinity in looks, between either of those whom he had so long thought his parents and the young soldier.

"Let the Doge of Genoa question his memory, and look farther than himself. Can he find no sleeping smile, no colour of the hair, nor any other common point of appearance, between the youth and some of those whom he once knew and loved?"

The anxious prince turned eagerly towards Sigismund, and a gleam of joy lighted his face again, as he studied the young man's features.

“ By San Francesco ! Melchior, the honest Balthazar is right. My grandmother was a Venetian, and she had the fair hair of the boy, the eye too, is hers—and—oh !” bending his head aside and veiling his eyes with his hand, “ I see the anxious gaze that was so constant in the sainted and injured Angiolina, after my greater wealth and power had tempted her kinsmen to force her to yield an unwilling hand !—Wretch ! thou art not Bartolo ; thy tale is a wicked deception, invented to shield thee from the punishment due to thy crime !”

“ Admitting that I am not Bartolo, eccellenza, does the Signor Sigismondo claim to be he ? Have you not assured yourself that a certain Bartolo Contini, a man whose life is passed in open hostility to the laws, is your child ? Did you not employ your confidant and secretary to learn the facts ? Did he not hear from the dying lips of a holy priest, who knew all the circumstances, that ‘ Bartolo Contini is the son of Gaetano Grimaldi.’ Did not the

confederate of your implacable enemy, Cristofero Serrani, swear the same to you? Have you not seen papers that were taken with your child to confirm it all, and did you not send this signet as a gage that Bartolo should not want your aid, in any strait that might occur in his wild manner of living, when you learned that he resolutely preferred remaining what he was, to becoming an image of sickly repentance and newly-assumed nobility, in your gorgeous palace on the Strada Balbi."

The Doge again bowed his head in dismay, for all this he knew to be true beyond a shadow of hope.

"Here is some sad mistake," he said with bitter regret. "Thou hast received the child of some other bereaved parent, Balthazar; but, though I cannot hope to prove myself the natural father of Sigismund, he shall at least find me one in affection and good offices. If his life be not due to me, I owe him mine; the

debt shall form a tie between us little short of that to which nature herself could give birth."

"Herr Doge," returned the earnest headsmen, "let us not be too hasty. If there are strong facts in favour of the claims of Maso, there are many circumstances, also, in favour of those of Sigismund. To me, the history of the last is probably more clear than it can be to any other. The time, the country, the age of the child, the name, and the fearful revelations of the criminal are all strong proofs in Sigismund's behalf. Here are the effects that were given me with the child; it is possible that they, too, may throw weight into his scale."

Balthazar had taken means to procure the package in question from among the luggage of Sigismund, and he now proceeded to expose its contents, while a breathless silence betrayed the interest with which the result was expected. He first laid upon the pavement of the chapel a collection of child's clothing. The articles

were rich, and according to the fashions of the times, but they contained no positive proofs that could go to substantiate the origin of the wearer, except as they raised the probability of his having come of an elevated rank in life. As the different objects were placed upon the stones, Adelheid and Christine kneeled beside them, each too intently absorbed with the progress of the inquiry to bethink themselves of those forms which, in common, throw a restraint upon the manners of their sex. The latter appeared to forget her own sorrows, for a moment, in a new-born interest in her brother's fortunes, while the ears of the former drank in each syllable that fell from the lips of the different speakers, with an avidity that her strong sympathy with the youth could alone give.

“ Here is a case containing trinkets of value,” added Balthazar. “ The condemned man said they were taken through ignorance, and he was accustomed to suffer the child to amuse himself with them in the prison.”

“ These were my first offerings to my wife in return for the gift she had made me of the precious babe !” said the Doge, in such a smothered voice as we are apt to use when examining objects that recall the presence of the dead — “ Blessed Angiolina ! these jewels are so many tokens of thy pale but happy countenance ; thou felt’st a mother’s joy at that sacred moment and couldst even smile on me !”

“ And here is a talisman in sapphire, with many Eastern characters ; I was told it had been an heir-loom in the family of the child, and was put about his neck at the birth by the hands of his own father.”

“ I ask no more — I ask no more ! God be praised for this, the last and best of all his mercies !” cried the Prince, clasping his hands with devotion. “ This jewel was worn by myself in infancy, and I placed it around the neck of the babe with my own hands, as thou sayest — I ask no more.”

"And Bartolo Contini!" uttered Il Maledetto.

"Maso!" exclaimed a voice, which until then had been mute in the chapel. It was Adelheid who had spoken. Her hair had fallen in wild profusion over her shoulders, as she still knelt over the articles on the pavement, and her hands were clasped entreatingly, as if she deprecated the rude interruptions which had so often dashed the cup from their lips, as they were about to yield to the delight of believing Sigismund to be the child of the Prince of Genoa.

"Thou art another of a fond and weak sex, to swell the list of confiding spirits that have been betrayed by the selfishness and falsehood of men," answered the mocking mariner. "Go to, girl!—make thyself a nun; thy Sigismund is an impostor."

Adelheid, by a quick but decided interposition of her hand, prevented an impetuous movement of the young soldier, who would have

struck his audacious rival to his feet. Without changing her kneeling attitude, she then spoke, modestly but with a firmness which generous sentiments enable women to assume even more readily than the stronger sex, when extraordinary occasions call for the sacrifice of that reserve in which her feebleness is ordinarily entrenched.

“ I know not, Maso, in what manner thou hast learned the tie which connects me with Sigismund,” she said ; “ but I have no longer any wish to conceal it. Be he the son of Balthazar, or be he the son of a prince, he has received my troth with the consent of my honoured father, and our fortunes will shortly be one. There might be forwardness in a maiden thus openly avowing her preference for a youth ; but here, with none to own him, oppressed with his long-endured wrongs, and assailed in his most sacred affections, Sigismund has a right to my voice. Let him belong to whom else he may,

I speak by my venerable father's authority, when I say he belongs to us."

"Melchior, is this true?" cried the Doge.

"The girl's words are but an echo of what my heart feels," answered the baron, looking about him proudly, as if he would browbeat any who should presume to think that he had consented to corrupt the blood of Willading by the measure.

"I have watched thine eye, Maso, as one nearly interested in the truth," continued Adelheid, "and I now appeal to thee, as thou lovest thine own soul, to disburthen thyself! While thou may'st have told some truth, the jealous affection of a woman has revealed to me that thou hast kept back part. Speak, then, and relieve the soul of this venerable prince from torture,"

"And deliver my own body to the wheel! This may be well to the warm imagination of a love-sick girl, but we of the contraband have too much practice in men uselessly to throw away an advantage."

“Thou may'st have confidence in our faith. I have seen much of thee within the last few days, Maso, and I wish not to think thee capable of the bloody deed that hath been committed on the mountain, though I fear thy life is only too ungoverned ; still I will not believe that the hero of the Leman can be the assassin of St. Bernard.”

“When thy young dreams are over, fair one, and thou seest the world under its true colours, thou wilt know that the hearts of men come partly of Heaven and partly of Hell.”

Maso laughed in his most reckless manner as he delivered this opinion.

“'Tis useless to deny that thou hast sympathies,” continued the maiden steadily : “thou hast in secret more pleasure in serving than in injuring thy race. Thou canst not have been in such straits in company with the Signor Sigismondo, without imbibing some touch of his noble generosity. You have struggled together for our common good, you come of the same God,

have the same manly courage, are equally stout of heart, strong of hand, and willing to do for others. Such a heart must have enough of noble and human impulses to cause you to love justice. Speak, then, and I pledge our sacred word, that thou shalt fare better for thy candour than by taking refuge in thy present fraud. Bethink thee, Maso, that the happiness of this aged man, of Sigismund himself, if thou wilt—for I blush not to say it,—of a weak and affectionate girl, is in thy keeping. Give us truth—holy, sacred truth—and we pardon the past.”

Il Maledetto was moved by the beautiful earnestness of the speaker. Her ingenuous interest in the result, with the solemnity of her appeal, shook his purpose.

“Thou know’st not what thou say’st, lady; thou ask’st my life,” he answered, after pondering in a way to give a new impulse to the dying hopes of the Doge.

“Though there is no quality more sacred

than justice," interposed the châtelain, who alone could speak with authority in the Valais; "it is fairly within the province of her servants to permit her to go unexpiated, in order that greater good may come of the sacrifice. If thou wilt prove aught that is of grave importance to the interests of the Prince of Genoa, Valais owes it to the love it bears his republic to requite the service."

Maso listened, at first, with a cold ear. He felt the distrust of one who had sufficient knowledge of the world to be acquainted with the thousand expedients that were resorted to by men, in order to justify their daily want of faith. He questioned the châtelain closely as to his meaning, nor was it until a late hour, and after long and weary explanations on both sides, that the parties came to an understanding.

On the part of those who, on this occasion, were the representatives of that high attribute of the Deity which among men is termed jus-

tice, it was sufficiently apparent that they understood its exercise with certain reservations that might be made at pleasure in favour of their own views; and, on the part of Maso, there was no attempt to conceal the suspicions he entertained to the last, that he might be a sufferer by lessening in any degree the strength of the defences by which he was at present shielded, as the son, real or fancied, of a person so powerful as the Prince of Genoa.

As usually happens when there is a mutual wish to avoid extremities, and when conflicting interests are managed with equal address, the negotiation terminated in a compromise. As the result will be shown in the regular course of the narrative, the reader is referred to the closing chapter for the explanation.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Speak, oh, speak !
And take me from the rack.”

YOUNG.

IT will be remembered that three days were passed in the convent in that interval which occurred between the arrival of the travellers and that of the châtelain and the bailiff. The determination of admitting the claims of Sigismund, so frankly announced by Adelheid in the preceding chapter, was taken during this time. Separated from the world, and amid that magnificent solitude where the passions and the vulgar interests of life sank into corresponding insignificance as the majesty of God became hourly more visible, the baron had been

gradually won upon to consent. Love for his child, aided by the fine moral and personal qualities of the young man himself, which here stood out in strong relief, like one of the stern piles of those Alps that now appeared to his eyes so much superior, in their eternal beds, to all the vine-clad hills and teeming valleys of the lower world, had been the immediate and efficient agents in producing this decision. It is not pretended that the Bernese made an easy conquest over his prejudices, which was in truth no other than a conquest over himself, he being, morally considered, little other than a collection of the narrow opinions and exclusive doctrines which it was then the fashion to believe necessary to high civilization. On the contrary, the struggle had been severe; nor is it probable that the gentle blandishments of Adelheid, the eloquent but silent appeals to his reason that were constantly made by Sigismund in his deportment, or the arguments of his old comrade, the Signor Grimaldi, who,

with a philosophy that is more often made apparent in our friendships than in our own practice, dilated copiously on the wisdom of sacrificing a few worthless and antiquated opinions to the happiness of an only child, would have prevailed, had the Baron been in a situation less abstracted from the ordinary circumstances of his rank and habits than that in which he had been so accidentally thrown. The pious clavier, too, who had obtained some claims to the confidence of the guests of the convent by his services, and by the risks he had run in their company, came to swell the number of Sigismund's friends. Of humble origin himself, and attached to the young man not only by his general merits but by his conduct on the lake, he neglected no good occasion to work upon Melchior's mind, after he himself had become acquainted with the nature of the young man's hopes. As they paced the brown and naked rocks together, in the vicinity of the convent, the Augustine discoursed on the perish-

able nature of human hopes and on the frailty of human opinions. He dwelt with pious fervour on the usefulness of recalling the thoughts from the turmoil of daily and contracted interests to a wider view of the truths of existence. Pointing to the wild scene around them, he likened the confused masses of the mountains, their sterility, and their ruthless tempests, to the world with its want of happy fruits, its disorders, and its violence. Then, directing the attention of his companion to the azure vault above them, which, seen at that elevation and in that pure atmosphere, resembled a benign canopy of the softest tints and colours, he made glowing appeals to the eternal and holy tranquillity of the state of being to which they were both fast hastening, and which had its type in the mysterious and imposing calm of that tranquil and illimitable void. He drew his moral in favour of a measured enjoyment of our advantages here, as well as of rendering love and justice to all who merited our esteem, and to

the disadvantage of those iron prejudices which confine the best sentiments in the fetters of opinions founded in the ordinances and provisions of the violent and selfish.

It was after one of these interesting dialogues that Melchior de Willading, his heart softened and his soul touched with the hopes of heaven, listened with a more indulgent ear to the firm declaration of Adelheid that, unless she became the wife of Sigismund, her self-respect, no less than her affections, must compel her to pass her life unmarried. We shall not say that the maiden herself philosophized on premises as sublime as those of the good monk, for with her the warm impulses of the heart lay at the bottom of her resolution, but even she had the respectable support of reason to sustain her cause. The baron had that innate desire to perpetuate his own existence in that of his descendants, which appears to be a property of nature. Alarmed at a declaration which threatened annihilation to his line, while at the same

time he was more than usually under the influence of his better feelings, he promised that, if the charge of murder could be removed from Balthazar, he would no longer oppose the union. We should be giving the reader an opinion a little too favourable of the Herr von Willading, were we to say that he did not repent having made this promise soon after it was uttered. He was in a state of mind that resembled the vanes of his own towers, which changed their direction with every fresh current of air, but he was by far too honourable to think seriously of violating a faith that he had once fairly plighted. He had moments of unpleasant misgivings as to the wisdom and propriety of his promise, but they were of that species of regret which is known to attend an unavoidable evil. If he had any expectations of being released from his pledge, they were bottomed on certain vague impressions that Balthazar would be found guilty, though the constant and earnest asseverations

of Sigismund in favour of his father had greatly succeeded in shaking his faith on this point. Adelheid had stronger hopes than either, the fears of the young man himself preventing him from fully participating in her confidence, while her father shared her expectations on that tormenting principle which causes us to dread the worst. When, therefore, the jewelry of Jacques Colis was found in the possession of Maso, and Balthazar was unanimously acquitted, not only from this circumstance, which went so conclusively to criminate another, but from the want of any other evidence against him than the fact of his being found in the bone-house instead of the refuge, an accident that might well have happened to any other traveller in the storm, the baron resolutely prepared himself to redeem his pledge. It is scarcely necessary to add how much this honourable sentiment was strengthened by the unexpected declaration of the headsman concerning the birth of Sigismund. Notwithstanding the asseveration

of Maso that the whole was an invention conceived to favour the son of Balthazar, it was supported by proofs so substantial and palpable, to say nothing of the natural and veracious manner in which the tale was related, as to create a strong probability in the minds of the witnesses, that it might be true. Although it remained to be discovered who were the real parents of Sigismund, few now believed that he owed his existence to the headsman.

A short summary of the facts may aid the reader in better understanding the circumstances on which so much of the dénouement depends.

It has been revealed in the course of the narrative that the Signor Grimaldi had wedded a lady younger than himself, whose affections were already in the possession of one who, in moral qualities, was unworthy of her love, but who in other respects was perhaps better suited to become her husband than the powerful noble to whom her family had given her hand.

The birth of their son was soon followed by the death of the mother and the abduction of the child. Years had passed before the Signor Grimaldi was apprised that the latter was still living. He had received this important information at a moment when the authorities of Genoa were most active in pursuing those who had long and desperately trifled with the laws, and the avowed motive for the revelation was an appeal to his natural affection in behalf of a son, who was likely to become the victim of his practices. The recovery of a child under such circumstances was a blow severer than his loss, and it will readily be supposed that the truth of the pretension of Maso, who then went by the name of Bartolomeo Contini, was admitted with the greatest caution. Reference had been made by the friends of the smuggler to a dying monk, whose character was above suspicion, and who corroborated, with his latest breath, the statement of Maso, by affirming before God and the saints

that he knew him, so far as man could know a fact like this, to be the son of the Signor Grimaldi. This grave testimony, given under circumstances of such solemnity, and supported by the production of important papers that had been stolen with the child, removed the suspicions of the Doge. He secretly interposed his interest to save the criminal, though, after a fruitless attempt to effect a reformation of his habits by means of confidential agents, he had never consented to see him.

Such then was the nature of the conflicting statements. While hope, and the pure delight of finding himself the father of a son like Sigismund, caused the aged prince to cling to the claims of the young soldier with fond pertinacity, his cooler and more deliberate judgment had already been formed in favour of another. In the long private examination which succeeded the scene in the chapel, Maso had gradually drawn more into himself, be-

coming vague and mysterious, until he succeeded in exciting a most painful state of doubt and expectation in all who witnessed his deportment. Profiting by this advantage, he suddenly changed his tactics. He promised revelations of importance, on the condition that he should first be placed in security within the frontiers of Piedmont. The prudent châtelain soon saw that the case was getting to be one in which Justice was expected to be blind in the more politic signification of the term. He, therefore, drew off his loquacious co-adjutor, the bailiff, in a way to leave the settlement of the affair to the feelings and wishes of the Doge. The latter, by the aid of Melchior and Sigismund, soon effected an understanding, in which the conditions of the mariner were admitted; when the party separated for the night. Il Maledetto, on whom weighed the entire load of Jacques Colis' murder, was again committed to his temporary prison, while Balthazar,

Pippo, and Conrad, were permitted to go at large, as having successfully passed the ordeal of examination.

Day dawned upon the Col long ere the shades of night had deserted the valley of the Rhone. All in the convent were in motion before the appearance of the sun, it being generally understood that the event which had so much disturbed the order of its peaceful inmates' lives was to be brought finally to a close, and that their duties were about to return into the customary channels. Orisons are constantly ascending to heaven from the pass of St. Bernard, but, on the present occasion, the stir in and about the chapel, the manner in which the good canons hurried to and fro through the long corridors, and the general air of excitement, proclaimed that the offices of the matins possessed more than the usual interest of the regular daily devotion.

The hour was still early when all on the pass assembled in the place of worship. The

body of Jacques Colis had been removed to a side chapel, where, covered with a pall, it awaited the mass for the dead. Two large church candles stood lighted on the steps of the great altar, and the spectators, including Pierre and the muleteers, the servants of the convent, and others of every rank and age, were drawn up in double files in its front. Among the silent spectators appeared Balthazar and his wife, Maso, in truth a prisoner, but with the air of a liberated man, the pilgrim, and Pippo. The good prior was present in his robes, with all of his community. During the moments of suspense which preceded the rites, he discoursed civilly with the châtelain and the bailiff, both of whom returned his courtesies with interest, and in the manner in which it becomes the dignified and honoured to respect appearances in the presence of their inferiors. Still the demeanour of most was feverish and excited, as if the occasion were one of compelled gaiety, into which unwelcome

and extraordinary circumstances of alloy had thrust themselves unbidden.

On the opening of the door a little procession entered headed by the clavier. Melchior de Willading led his daughter, Sigismund came next, followed by Marguerite and Christine, and the venerable Doge brought up the rear. Simple as was this wedding train, it was imposing from the dignity of the principal actors, and from the evidences of deep feeling with which all in it advanced to the altar. Sigismund was firm and self-possessed. Still his carriage was lofty and proud, as if he felt that a cloud still hung over that portion of his history to which the world attached so much importance, and he had fallen back on his character and principles for support. Adelheid had lately been so much the subject of strong emotions that she presented herself before the priest with less trepidation than was usual for a maiden, but the fixed regard, the colourless cheek, and an air of profound reverence, announced the depth

and solemn character of the feelings with which she was prepared to take the vows.

The marriage rites were celebrated by the good clavier, who, not content with persuading the baron to make this sacrifice of his prejudices, had asked permission to finish the work he had so happily commenced, by pronouncing the nuptial benediction. Melchior de Willading listened to the short ceremony with silent self-approval. He felt disposed at that instant to believe he had wisely sacrificed the interests of the world to the right, a sentiment that was a little quickened by the uncertainty which still hung over the origin of his new son, who might yet prove to be all that he could hope, as well as by the momentary satisfaction he found in manifesting his independence by bestowing the hand of his daughter upon one whose merit was so much better ascertained than his birth. In this manner do the best deceive themselves, yielding frequently to motives that would not support

investigation when they believe themselves the strongest in the right. The good-natured clavier had observed the wavering and uncertain character of the baron's decision, and he had been induced to urge his particular request to be the officiating priest by a secret apprehension that, descended again into the scenes of the world, the relenting father might become, like most other parents of these nether regions, more disposed to consult the temporal advancement than the true happiness of his child.

As one of the parties was a Protestant no mass was said, an omission, however, that in no degree impaired the legal character of the engagement. Adelheid plighted her unvarying love and fidelity with maiden modesty, but with the steadiness of a woman whose affections and principles were superior to the little weaknesses which, on such occasions, are most apt to unsettle those who have the least of either of these great distinctive essentials of the sex. The vows to cherish and protect were

uttered by Sigismund in deep manly sincerity, for, at that moment, he felt as if a life of devotion to her happiness would scarcely requite her single-minded, feminine, and unvarying truth.

“ May God bless thee, dearest !” murmured old Melchior, as, bending over his kneeling child, he struggled to keep down a heart which appeared disposed to mount into his throat, in spite of its master’s inclinations ; “ bless thee—bless thee, love, now and for ever ! Providence has dealt sternly with thy brothers and sisters, but in leaving thee, it has still left me rich in offspring. Here is our good friend, Gaetano, too—his fortune has been still harder—but we will hope—we will hope. And thou, Sigismund, now that Balthazar hath disowned thee, thou must accept such a father as Heaven sends. All accidents of early life are forgotten, and Willåding, like my old heart, hath gotten a new owner and a new lord !”

The young man exchanged embraces with

the baron, whose character he knew to be kind in the main, and for whom he felt the regard which was natural to his present situation. He then turned, with a hesitating eye, to the Signor Grimaldi. The Doge succeeded his friend in paying the compliments of affection to the bride, and had just released Adelheid with a warm paternal kiss.

“I pray Maria and her holy son in thy behalf!” said the venerable Prince with dignity. “Thou enterest on new and serious duties, child, but the spirit and purity of an angel, a meekness that does not depress, and a character whose force rather relieves than injures the softness of thy sex, can temper the ills of this fickle world, and thou may’st justly hope to see a fair portion of that felicity which thy young imagination pictures in such golden colours. And thou,” he added, turning to meet the embrace of Sigismund, “whoever thou art by the first disposition of Providence, thou art now rightfully dear to me. The husband of Melchior de Willading’s daughter would ever

have a claim upon his most ancient and dearest friend, but we are united by a tie that has the interest of a singular and solemn mystery. My reason tells me that I am punished for much early and wanton pride and wilfulness, in being the parent of a child that few men in any condition of life could wish to claim, while my heart would fain flatter me with being the father of a son of whom an emperor might be proud ! Thou art, and thou art not, of my blood. Without these proofs of Maso's, and the testimony of the dying monk, I should proclaim thee to be the latter without hesitation ; but be thou what thou may'st by birth, thou art entirely and without alloy of my love. Be tender of this fragile flower that Providence hath put under thy protection, Sigismund ; cherish it as thou valuest thine own soul ; the generous and confiding love of a virtuous woman is always a support, frequently a triumphant stay, to the tottering principles of man. Oh ! had it pleased God earlier to have

given me Angiolina, how different might have been our lives ! This dark uncertainty would not now hang over the most precious of human affections, and my closing hour would be blessed. Heaven and its saints preserve you both, my children, and preserve you long in your present innocence and affection !”

The venerable Doge ceased. The effort which had enabled him to speak gave way, and he turned aside that he might weep in the decent reserve that became his station and years.

Until now Marguerite had been silent, watching the countenances, and drinking in with avidity the words, of the different speakers. It was now her turn. Sigismund knelt at her feet, pressing her hands to his lips in a manner to show that her high though stern character had left deep traces in his recollection. Releasing herself from his convulsed grasp, for just then the young man felt intensely the violence of severing those early ties which, in his case, had perhaps something

of wild romance from their secret nature, she parted the curls on his ample brow, and stood gazing long at his face, studying each lineament to its minutest shade.

“No,” she said, mournfully shaking her head, “truly thou art not of us, and God hath dealt mercifully in taking away the innocent little creature whose place thou hast so long innocently usurped! Thou wert dear to me, Sigismund—very dear—for I thought thee under the curse of my race; do not hate me, if I say my heart is now in the grave of—”

“Mother!” exclaimed the young man reproachfully.

“Well, I am still thy mother,” answered Marguerite, smiling, though painfully; “thou art a noble boy, and no change of fortune can ever alter thy soul. ’Tis a cruel parting, Balthazar, and I know not, after all, that thou didst well to deceive me; for I have had as much grief as joy in the youth—grief, bitter grief, that one like him should be condemned

to live under the curse of our race—but it is ended now—he is not of us—no, he is no longer of us !”

This was uttered so plaintively that Sigismund bent his face to his hands and sobbed aloud.

“ Now that the happy and proud weep, ’tis time the wretched dried their tears,” added the wife of Balthazar, looking about her with a sad mixture of agony and pride struggling in her countenance ; for, in spite of her professions, it was plain that she yielded her claim on the noble youth with deep yearnings and an intense agony of spirit. “ We have one consolation, at least, Christine—all that are not of our blood will not despise us now ! Am I right, Sigismund—thou too wilt not turn upon us with the world, and hate those whom thou once loved’st ?”

“ Mother, mother, for the sake of the Holy Virgin, do not harrow my soul !”

“I will not distrust thee, dear; thou didst not drink at my breast, but thou hast taken in too many lessons of truth from my lips to despise us—and yet thou art not of us; thou mayest possibly prove a Prince’s son, and the world so hardens the heart—and they who have been sorely pressed upon become suspicious—”

“For the love of God, cease, mother, or thou wilt break my heart!”

“Come hither, Christine. Sigismund, this maiden goes with thy wife: we have the greatest confidence in the truth and principles of her thou hast wedded, for she has been tried and not found wanting. Be tender to the child; she was once thy sister, and then thou wast used to love her.”

“Mother—thou wilt make me curse the hour I was born!”

Marguerite, while she could not overcome the cold distrust which habit had interwoven

with all her opinions, felt that she was cruel, and she said no more. Stooping, she kissed the cold forehead of the young man, gave a warm embrace to her daughter, over whom she prayed fervently for a minute, and then placed the insensible girl in the open arms of Adelheid. The awful workings of nature were subdued by a superhuman will, and she turned slowly towards the silent, respectful crowd, who had scarcely breathed during this exhibition of her noble character.

“Doth any here,” she sternly asked, “suspect the innocence of Balthazar?”

“None, good woman, none!” returned the bailiff, wiping his eyes; “go in peace to thy home, o’ Heaven’s sake, and God be with thee!”

“He stands acquitted before God and man!” added the more dignified châtelain.

Marguerite motioned for Balthazar to precede her, and she prepared to quit the chapel. On the threshold she turned and cast a

lingering look at Sigismund and Christine. They were weeping in each other's arms, and the soul of Marguerite yearned to mingle her tears with the tears of those she loved so well. But, stern in her resolutions, she stayed the torrent of feeling which would have been terrible in its violence had it broken loose, and followed her husband, with a dry and glowing eye. They descended the mountain, with a vacuum in their hearts which taught even this persecuted pair that there are griefs in nature that surpass all the artificial woes of life.

The scene just related did not fail to disturb the spectators. Maso dashed his hand across his eyes, and seemed touched with a stronger working of sympathy than it accorded with his present policy to show, while both Conrad and Pippo did credit to their humanity by fairly shedding tears. The latter, indeed, showed manifestations of a sensibility that is not altogether incompatible with ordinary recklessness and

looseness of principle. He even begged leave to kiss the hand of the bride, wishing her joy with fervour, as one who had gone through great danger in her company. The whole party then separated with an exchange of cordial good feeling which proves that, however much men may be disposed to jostle and discompose their fellows in the great highway of life, nature has infused into their composition some great redeeming qualities to make us regret the abuses by which they have been so much perverted.

On quitting the chapel the whole of the travellers made their dispositions to depart. The bailiff and the châtelain went down towards the Rhone, as well satisfied with themselves as if they had discharged their trust with fidelity by committing Maso to prison, and discoursing, as they rode along, on the singular chances which had brought a son of the Doge of Genoa before them, in a condition so questionable. The good Augustines helped the tra-

vellers who were destined for the other descent into their saddles, and acquitted themselves of the last act of hospitality by following the footsteps of the mules, with wishes for their safe arrival at Aosta.

The path across the Col has been already described. It winds along the margin of the little lake, passing the site of the ancient temple of Jupiter at the distance of a few hundred yards from the convent. Sweeping past the northern extremity of the little basin, where it crosses the frontiers of Piedmont, it cuts the ragged wall of rock, and, after winding *en corniche* for a short distance by the edge of a fearful ravine, it plunges at once towards the plains of Italy.

As there was a desire to have no unnecessary witnesses of Maso's promised revelations, Conrad and Pippo had been advised to quit the mountain before the rest of the party, and the muleteers were requested to keep a little in the rear. At the point where the path leaves

the lake, the whole dismounted, Pierre going ahead with the beasts, with a view to make the first precipitous pitch from the col on foot. Maso now took the lead. When he reached the spot where the convent is last in view, he stopped and turned to gaze at the venerable and storm-beaten pile.

“Thou hesitatest,” observed the Baron de Willading, who suspected an intention to escape.

“Signore, the look at even a stone is a melancholy office, when it is known to be the last. I have often climbed to the col, but I shall never dare do it again, for, though the honourable and worthy châtelain, and the most worthy bailiff are willing to pay their homage to a Doge of Genoa in his own person, they may be less tender of his honour when he is absent. Addio, caro San Bernardo! Like me, thou art solitary and weather-beaten, and like me, though rude of aspect, thou hast thy uses. We are both beacons—thou to tell the traveller

where to seek safety, and I to warn him where danger is to be avoided."

There is a dignity in manly suffering that commands our sympathies. All who heard this apostrophe to the abode of the Augustines were struck with its simplicity and its moral. They followed the speaker in silence, however, to the point where the path makes its first sudden descent. The spot was favourable to the purpose of *Il Maledetto*. Though still on the level of the lake, the convent, the col, and all it contained, with the exception of a short line of its stony path, were shut from their view by the barrier of intervening rock. The ravine lay beneath, ragged, ferruginous, and riven into a hundred faces by the eternal action of the seasons. All above, beneath, and around, was naked, and chaotic as the elements of the globe before they received the ordering touch of the Creator. The imagination could scarcely picture a scene of greater solitude and desolation.

"Signore," said Maso, respectfully raising his cap, and speaking with calmness, "this confusion of nature resembles my own character. Here every thing is torn, sterile, and wild; but patience, charity, and generous love have been able to change even this rocky height into an abode for those who live for the good of others. There is none so worthless that use may not be made of him. We are types of the earth our mother; useless, and savage, or repaying the labour that we receive, as we are treated like men, or hunted like beasts. If the great, and the powerful, and the honoured, would become the friends and monitors of the weak and ignorant, instead of remaining so many watch-dogs to snarl at and bite all that they fear may encroach on their privileges, raising the cry of the wolf each time that they hear the wail of the timid and bleating lamb, the fairest works of God would not be so often defaced. I have lived, and it is probable that I shall die, an outlaw; but the severest pangs I

ever know come from the mockery which accuses my nature of abuses that are the fruits of your own injustice. That stone," kicking a bit of rock from the path into the ravine beneath, "is as much master of its direction after my foot has set its mass in motion, as the poor untaught being who is thrown upon the world, despised, unaided, suspected, and condemned even before he has sinned, has the command of his own course. My mother was fair and good. She wanted only the power to withstand the arts of one, who, honoured in the opinions of all around her, undermined her virtue. He was great, noble, and powerful; while she had little besides her beauty and her weakness. Signori, —the odds against her were too much. I was the punishment of her fault. I came into a world then, in which every man despised me before I had done any act to deserve its scorn.

"Nay, this is pushing opinions to extremes!" interrupted the Signor Grimaldi, who had

scarce breathed, in his eagerness to catch the syllables as they came from the other's tongue.

“ We began, Signori, as we have ended ; distrustful and struggling to see which could do the other the most harm. A reverend and holy monk, who knew my history, would have filled a soul with heaven that the wrongs of the world had already driven to the verge of hell. The experiment failed. Homily and precept,” Maso smiled bitterly as he continued, “ are but indifferent weapons to fight with against hourly wrongs ; instead of becoming a cardinal and the counsellor of the head of the church, I am the man ye see. Signor Grimaldi, the monk who gave me his care was Father Girolamo. He told the truth to thy secretary, for I am the son of poor Annunziata Altieri, who was once thought worthy to attract thy passing notice. The deception of calling myself another of thy children was practised for my own security. The means were offered by an accidental confederacy with one of

the instruments of thy formidable enemy and cousin, who furnished the papers that had been taken with the little Gaetano. The truth of what I say shall be delivered to you at Genoa. As for the Signor Sigismondo, it is time we ceased to be rivals. We are brothers, with this difference in our fortunes, that he comes of wedlock, and I of an unexpiated, and almost an unrepented, crime !”

A common cry, in which regret, joy and surprise were wildly mingled, interrupted the speaker. Adelheid threw herself into her husband's arms, and the pale and conscience-stricken Doge stood with extended arms, an image of contrition, delight, and shame. His friends pressed around him, with consolation on their tongues and the blandishments of affection in their manner, for the regrets of the great rarely pass away unheeded, like the moans of the low.

“ Let me have air !” exclaimed the prince ;
“ give me air or I suffocate ! Where is the

child of Annunziata?—I will at least atone to him for the wrong done his mother!”

It was too late. The victim of another's fault had cast himself over the edge of the precipice with reckless hardihood, and he was already beyond the reach of the voice, in his swift descent, by a shorter but dangerous path, towards Aosta. Nettuno was at his heels. It was evident that he endeavoured to outstrip Pippo and Conrad, who were trudging ahead by the more beaten road. In a few minutes he turned the brow of a beetling rock, and was lost to view.

This was the last that was known of Il Maledetto. At Genoa, the Doge secretly received the confirmation of all that he had heard, and Sigismund was legally placed in possession of his birthright. The latter made many generous but useless efforts to discover and to reclaim his brother. With a delicacy that could hardly be expected, the outlaw had withdrawn from a scene which he now felt to

be unsuited to his habits, and he never permitted the veil to be withdrawn from the place of his retreat.

The only consolation that his relatives ever obtained arose from an event which brought Pippo under the condemnation of the law. Before his execution, the buffoon confessed that Jacques Colis fell by the hands of Conrad and himself, and that, ignorant of Maso's expedient on his own account, they had made use of Nettuno to convey the plundered jewellery undetected across the frontiers of Piedmont.

THE END.

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